OLD CROW

ALICE BROWN

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THE PRISONER
MY LOVE AND I
ONE ACT PLAYS
THE BLACK DROP
VANISHING POINTS
ROBIN HOOD'S BARN
CHILDREN OF EARTH
HOMESPUN AND GOLD
THE FLYING TEUTON
THE ROAD TO CASTALY
LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY
BROMLEY NEIGHBORHOOD
THE SECRET OF THE CLAN
THE WIND BETWEEN THE WORLDS

OLD CROW

BY

ALICE BROWN

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OLD CROW

I

John Raven sat in the library of his shabby, yet dignified Boston house, waiting for Richard Powell, his nephew, whom he had summoned for an intimate talk. He was sitting by the fire making a pretense of reading the evening paper, but really he was prefiguring the coming interview, dreading it a good deal, and chiefly for the reason that there was an argument to be presented, and for this he was insufficiently prepared, and must be, however long it might be delayed. When he telephoned Dick to come he was at last armed with a bold conviction of being able to proffer a certain case to him (his own case, in fact); but, as these last moments went on, he weakened sensibly in any hope he might have had that Dick would be able to meet him from any illuminating viewpoint of his own. This was mid-winter, two years after the end of the War, where Dick and his uncle had worked in the Ambulance Corps to the limit of their capacities—Dick, no soldier, because of what seemed to him a diabolic eccentricity of imperfect sight, and Raven, blocked by what he felt to be the negligible disability of age. John Raven had, with the beginning of the War—which, as early as 1914 he had decided to be his war—made up his mind that although he was over

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forty and of a business training with inconsiderable excursions into literature, he wanted nothing so much as to get into the thick of it and the rough of it, so far as a man might who was past his physical best, and now he was back again, more fit than when he went, but at this present moment breathless at the realization that he had been up against life as it actually is, and that he found it a brute business and hated it. And this was not so much the horror of life in the field where, however the human heart cried out against the argument of desecrated flesh, the spirit could call mightily upon God, challenging Him to grant the chrism of fulfilment in return for this wild sacrifice of blood, as the horror of life when peace was exercising her rights in unbelievable ways. This he was going to explain to Dick, if he could manage it, while he set forth also his need of retreating from the active scene and leaving some of his formerly accepted duties on Dick's shoulders. As he sat there, gaunt, long, lean man, with a thin brown face and the eagle's look, a fineness of aquiline curve that made him significant in a dominant type, he fitted his room as the room fitted him. The house was old; nothing had been changed in it since the year when, in his first-won prosperity, he persuaded his mother up from the country and let her furnish it with her shyly modest taste, a sense of values that bade her keep within the boundary of the atmosphere she brought with her in good old pieces tenderly used. The room was dim, even by day, from these shadows of the brooding past, and the dull blue draperies at the windows, while they touched it to a more inspiriting tone, still spoke softly of the repose a man wanted when he escaped from the outer world to the assuagement of silence and his books.

To-night, when Raven had just about come to the

conclusion that he could not possibly enter upon certain things with Dick because, although Dick elected to be a poet, there was no recognized form of words that would make him understand, and he'd better telephone him to put the interview off, he heard his voice in the hall, and, answering it, even breaking over it, like bright bubbles of a vocal stream, the voice of the girl they both loved, in ways becoming to their differences. Raven drew a comfortable breath. The intimate conference with Dick would have to be deferred, though he would quite as willingly have had Nan listen to it, except for the chance of her carrying it away with her, in that sympathetic tenderness of hers, to burden her young heart. Nan would have made quick work of understanding. She translated you as you went, and even ran ahead of you, in her haste, just as she sometimes cut in on your speech, not rudely rebuking you for being too slow, but in her eagerness to assure you she caught at the first toss. And then they came in, she full of anticipatory delight at seeing Raven, and Dick so full of her that he seemed not to know whether his uncle were there or not, except as an habitual figure in the furnishing of the room.

We must pause a dull minute, while they were projecting themselves into the scene, to find out how they looked and whether they also fitted the room and Raven. Nan, known to her larger world as Annette Hamilton, was a tall, slim, yet muscular girl, graced with as many physical contradictions as you are likely to imagine. While she stood for an instant before, puppy-like, precipitating herself upon Raven, her eyes crinkled up like Mary Seraskier's, and she showed a line of milk-white teeth. Altogether nature—for she had only the most inconsiderable help from art—had done her exceedingly well. She had the hurling impetuosities of the puppy when she

found herself anywhere near persons familiarly dear to her; but, unlike the puppy, she was a thing of grace. Her hands and slim arms had a girl's loveliest contours, and yet, hidden somewhere under that satin flesh with its rose and silver lustre, were muscles serviceably strong. Her eyes were grey like Athena's, her hair fine and thick and pale, and her face altogether too irregular to talk about reasonably.

How is it possible to delineate Dick, even with all profuse generosity of comment, without suggesting that he was not of the type to please himself, or tagging him with a priggishness afar from him? He certainly was not the sort of hero his dramatic poems described with a choppy vigor of detail, and whom there is no doubt he would have chosen to resemble. But nature had given him a slimness and an actual grace he found, in his private self-scrutiny, almost girlish, nor could he wholly outwit and supplement her by the athletic training he never intermitted. Dick's face, too, he found much against him, being of a round solidity with a nose too thick and a mouth a thought too small. How could such despite have happened to him, he asked himself in moments of depression when, confronting the mirror, he recognized the wrongs inheritance had done him. But he knew. It was father's people, that was it. They were all round and owlish, and they thickened up in middle life. If he could have shared Uncle Jack's lean aquilinity, people would have looked at him twice, as they did at Uncle Jack, which in itself would be a bore, except that Nan also might look. Aware of these things and hiding them in his soul, he held himself tight, shut his mouth close, and challenged you with a spectacled eye, pinning you down as if to say: "I am born in every particular as I didn't want to be, but take notice that

I'll have no light recognition of the hateful trick they did me. I am in training for a husky fellow. I haven't let up on myself one instant since I found out how horrible it was to be a good deal more of a fellow than I shall ever look. I never shall let up. And don't you let me catch you letting up either, in the way you treat me."

Nan, to go back to the minute of their entrance, made a swift assault upon Raven. In the old days when he was a youngish man and she a little girl, a growing thing, elongating like Alice, she used to hurl herself into his arms and insist on staying there. Her aunt, Miss Anne Hamilton, who had brought her up from babyhood, was always detaching her from Raven; but Nan clung as persistently. Raven would look at Miss Anne, over the girl's rumpled silk poll, with whimsically imploring eyes. Why couldn't Nan be allowed to break upon him like a salty, fragrant wave of the sea, he seemed to ask Miss Anne, bringing all sorts of floating richness, the outcrop of her fancies and affections? Aunt Anne would return the glance with her sweet, immovable deprecation and go on detaching, while Nan, with an equal obstinacy —though hers was protesting, vocable, sometimes shrill to the point of anguish—stuck to her self-assumed rights. It was Raven himself who involuntarily stepped over to Aunt Anne's side and finished the detaching process. When Nan came back after her first term at the seminary Aunt Anne preferred to college, and was running to him with her challenge of welcome, he was taken aback by the nymph-like grace and beauty of her, the poise of the small head with its braided crown—the girls at the seminary told her she might have been a Victorian by the way she wore her hair—and he instinctively caught her arms, about to enwreath his neck, held her still and

looked at her. She could not know what vision, overwhelming in its suddenness, she brought before him, of childhood gone and maidenhood come and the sacredness of this new state. Aunt Anne knew and frowned a little to herself, from her silent, savage jealousy, realizing, though she would never, in her proud integrity, allow herself to think it, that this hushed veneration of Raven's was worse than the old tumultuous intercourse. What Raven really might have said was:

"Darling, you're a woman and you're a beauty. You don't know it, but you don't want to hug a jaded old reveler like me."

He was not, by any means, a reveler. His life had been little more than a series of walks to business. But those were the words that came to him, catching her adorable freshness of body and mind, and determining to keep it untouched by dusty old pantaloons such as he saw himself. Nan stood for a minute paling out under his eyes, and then drew away from him and left the room, her braid-crowned head high. She had to meet him at dinner, and he knew she had cried and Aunt Anne knew it and was hard on her over the little things she could reprove her for, in a silky, affectionate way, and Raven's heart swelled until he thought they both must know its congestion, and tried to put round it another bond of quiet, kind affection. Since that time, Nan had never kissed him; but now, this two months since the death of Aunt Anne, she had adopted a greeting of her own. She put her hands on his arm and bent her forehead for a minute to his shoulder. The first time she did it, he wanted to kiss the bright hair, but forbade himself, and the second time he said, he was so curious over it:

"A rite?"

She was ready with her answer. He suspected she must have thought it out ingeniously beforehand.

"It's because I'm sorry for you."

"Sorry?" he repeated.

"Yes," she said, "about Aunt Anne."

Then he realized she was sorry because Aunt Anne was dead, and he was more and more conscious of the unbecoming lightness and freedom where he found himself at the death of Aunt Anne. He had not dared acknowledge it to himself. He couldn't, for shame. But whereas, in the past years, when he ventured to formulate his own life a little and see what it had done to him and how he could go on meeting it, he had had a sense of harassment and of being driven too hard, after Aunt Anne's death he began to recognize the stillness of the space she had left behind. Now to-day, before Nan had accomplished the little rite of the bowed head on his shoulder, something queer about it seemed to strike Dick, and he said to her:

"He's your uncle, too, you know."

Raven took this with composure, as signifying the length as well as the depth of his adoptive relation toward her, but Nan met it with resentment. She left him and turned upon Dick.

"Now what," she said, "do you mean by that?"

"Why, Nan," said the poor youth, keeping a stiff upper lip, because he recognized the signs of an approaching squabble, "I've told him. I'll tell him again. Jack, we're engaged."

"We're nothing of the sort," said Nan, either in pure surprise or an excellent simulation of it.

Dick met this doggedly.

"We are, too," he said. "You promised me."

"Maybe I did," Nan yielded. "But it was that awful

night when you were going out. We won't talk about that. I'd have promised you anything then. I'd have promised anybody, just as I'd have given 'em coffee or a smoke. But when we got back and you expected to begin from there, didn't I tell you to shut up? I've told you to ever since. And I believe," she added, with an acumen that struck him in the center, "you're only dragging it out now to catch me—before him."

"I did shut up," said Dick, holding himself straight and using his mouth tautly, "because your aunt was sick and then because she was worse. But you needn't think I've shut up for good. Besides, it's only Jack I told. He's nobody."

"No," said Raven mildly, "I'm nobody. Only I wish you wouldn't come here to fight. Why can't you get it over on the steps, and then act like Christians after you come in?"

Nan laughed. She was instantly and most obligingly sweet, as if wholly bent on pleasing him. But Richard glowered. It was quite like her, he thought, to sprinkle herself over with that May morning look of hers when she knew she had the horrible advantage not only of being adorable in herself, but a female to boot, within all the sanctities that still do hedge the sex, however it behaves.

"You see," said Nan maternally, "in France we were living at high pressure. Now everything's different. We mustn't be silly. Run away, Dick, just as I told you, and leave me to talk to Rookie."

This was her name for Raven, saved over from childish days.

"All right then," said Dick. "But I sha'n't wait for you. I shall go to Cambridge."

It was such an anticlimax of a threat, delivered in

so determined a voice, that he expected them to laugh, in a silly way they had of seeing the merest foolishness always from the same angle. But, as he turned to go, it was with the chill certainty that they had forgotten all about him. Nan had settled herself by the fire and his uncle was bringing her a footstool, an elderly attention, Dick floutingly thought, very well suited to Aunt Anne, but pure silliness for a girl who flung herself about all over the place. At any rate, he wasn't wanted, and he did go to Cambridge and hunted up some of the fellows likely to talk sense; but no sooner had he settled within their circle of geniality than he found himself glooming over Nan and tempted to go back and break in on that mysterious conclave.

It was mysterious. Nan herself had made it so. Her face, on Dick's going, had fallen into a grave repose, and she turned at once to Raven, saying:

"You see, Dick ran in on the way over here, and when he told me you'd sent for him, I said I'd come along, because I'd got to see you instead. Was that cheeky? I really have got to. Couldn't the other thing wait?"

"Perfectly well," said Raven, with a ready cheerfulness he was aware she could not understand. How should she? He had not been in the habit of troubling Dick, or indeed any one, with his vaporings. He had lived, of late years, as a sedate, middle-aged gentleman should, with no implication of finding the world any less roseate than his hopes had promised. As to Dick, the very sight of him had shown him beyond a doubt how little disposed he was to take the lad into that area of tumultuous discontent which was now his mind. "Fire away," he bade her. "You in trouble, dear? You want patriarchal advice?"

Nan might not have heard. She was looking, with a frowning gravity, into the fire. How should she begin? He saw the question beating about in her mind and hoped he could give her a lead. But she found the way for herself. She turned to him with a sudden lovely smile.

"Aunt Anne," she said, "has done something beautiful."

He felt his heart shrinking within him as he combated the ungracious feeling which, it seemed, would not down: that he was never to be done with Aunt Anne's deeds, so often demanding, as they did, a reciprocal action from him. What he wanted, he realized grimly, was to have his cake and eat it, if he might use so homespun a simile for a woman who had persistently lived for him and in him and then had made clear spaces about him by going away in the dignity of death. He wanted to breathe in the space she had left, and he also wanted to be spared the indecency of recognizing his relief. But Nan, studying the fire persistently, to allow his eyes all possible liberty of searching her face while she generously avoided his, was going on in what was evidently a preconceived task of breaking something to him.

"Yes, she's done something beautiful, and done it for you."

Raven's heart had shrunk so now that he wondered it could weigh so heavily. How could a woman, his rebellious intelligence asked him, manage to pursue a man with her benefits even from the grave? All his grown-up life he had fought them, but still they hung about him him like shackles. When he tore them off from one member—always wounding himself only, and scrupulously sure of never, except by the inevitability of his refusals, hurting her—they fastened on him somewhere else. When he was under twenty—for he was fourteen

years younger than she—had come the question of her endowing him for the period of his apprenticeship to literature, that he might write with a free mind. He had, tempting as that was and safe as it seemed to his arrogant youth, found the decency and prudence to refuse. He wondered now how he had been spared, saved really by the prophetic gods from taking that guarantee, though he was then so sure of his ability to justify the risk and pay it all back. Perhaps his mother had helped him. She was a woman of rare sanity, and though he could not remember her uttering a dissuading word, he was sure, in the light of his own middle-aged vision, that she must have been throwing the weight of her clear-mindedness into the scale.

Then there was the question of a college course and of European travel: those were among the colossal gifts Anne Hamilton had sought to lavish on him. But again he had saved himself, accepting one thing only, a benefit that must have hurt her heart like a stone, she was so bent on his beautiful, bright aptitude at writing taking its place as soon as possible, and with no dimming from a prosaic drudgery, in the world as she knew it: the Boston world, the New England world, the court of judgment that sits across the Atlantic. This benefit he asked for and received, from her father: a clerk's place in the mills—Hamilton was a wool magnate—and a chance to earn steady money for himself and his mother, who was every year, in spite of her stout heart, slipping into the weakness of the chronic invalid. Raven wrote his books at the fag end of days given to his dull industry, and he succeeded in calling attention to himself as a classical scholar, and then, as he impatiently hit out with what he called pot-boilers in dialect, he got a popular hearing and more money as well. All the time he

was advancing in the mills, and, as he advanced, he never failed to see before him the flutter of Anne's discreet draperies or hear the click of her determined heel. She never appeared in the business at all, but he was perfectly sure there wasn't a preferment offered him by her father for which he wasn't indebted to her manipulation of Hamilton in long, skillful hours beforehand. Hamilton had no slightest idea he was being influenced, but, as the years went on, he grew in appreciation of young Raven's business abilities to such a degree that John, reading his mind like a familiar tongue, wondered whether after all it was true, and he hadn't a genius for the affairs of wool. Was he doing the thing that seemed so dull to him with such mechanical and yet consummate cleverness that he was worth all this unripe advancement, or was it indeed Anne's white hand that was turning the wheel of power, her wand that was keeping the augmented vision of him ever before her father's credulous eyes? But he could not retard the wheels of his progress without making a fool of himself, and by the time his sister had prosperously married and his mother had died, he was a partner in the business, and then Hamilton also died and Raven was asking Dick, hoping all the time he would refuse, if he wanted to come in. Dick did refuse, with an instant hearty decision for which his uncle inwardly blessed him. Raven had got so restive by this time over the position he had himself won through Anne's generalship that he felt the curse was going down through the family, and that Dick, if he should come in, would wake up at forty-odd and find himself under the too heavy shade of the Hamilton benevolence.

"Not on your life," said Dick, when he was half-heartedly offered the chance of battening on wool, "not

while Mum's got the dough. There's only one of me, and she's bound to keep me going."

"You couldn't marry on it," said Raven.

For that also Dick was cheerfully prepared.

"By the time Nan's ready," he said, having at that point asked her intermittently for several years, "I shall be getting barrelfuls out of my plays."

" 'If,' " quoted Raven, " 'Medina Sidonia had waited for the skin of the bear that was not yet killed, he might have catched a great cold.' "

"That's all right," said Dick. "You needn't worry, not till it begins to worry me. The only thing that gets me is not pinning Nan down."

"Yes," said Raven, "she's a difficult person to pin."

And saying it, he had a vision of a bright butterfly with "dye-dusty wings" in stiff, glass-covered brittleness. He wondered if marrying might pin Nan down like that.

Another thought troubled him a little: whether Dick had built even obscurely in his own mind on the money Nan would have from Aunt Anne, and the more modest sum she had now from her dead father and mother. He concluded not. He hadn't got to worry about that. Dick had lived in the atmosphere of money and he took its permanence for granted.

But we are keeping Nan looking at the fire and trying to get her news out adequately, waiting a long time for these explanatory excursions into past history. Raven also was waiting, a good deal excited and conscious of his apprehensive heart. And when she spoke, in a studied quietude, he found the words were the very last he expected to hear:

"I wanted to be the one to tell you. We've found her will."

II

They sat there silent for several minutes. Raven was keeping desperate clutch on the inner self lashed by his hurrying heart, and telling it there was no danger of his saying any of the things it was hounding him on to say. He wanted to break out with an untempered violence:

"Of course you've found it. And of course she's left a lot of it to me."

He did not really believe that: only it so linked up with the chain of her unceasing benevolences toward him that it seemed the only thing to complete them adequately. And Nan, as if his premonition had prompted her, too, was saying, after the minute she had left him to get his pace even with hers, as if to assure him that, although she knew so much more than he, she wouldn't hurry ahead:

"Rookie, dear, she's left it all to you."

Raven felt himself tighten up, every nerve and sinew of him, to do something before it should be too late. He bent forward to her and said, a sharp query:

"Who found it?"

"Why," said Nan, smiling as if she couldn't ask anything better, "I found it, in a perfectly innocent looking envelope with some old deeds and mortgages."

"You haven't got it here, have you?" he pelted on. "You didn't bring it with you?"

His eyes interrogated her with his voice, and she shook her head, wondering at him.

"Nothing to you?" he asked sharply. "I'm the sole legatee?"

"Oh, I have the house, of course," said Nan, "the one here and the place at Wake Hill. She had those only for her lifetime, you know. Yes, you're the sole legatee."

"You haven't told anybody, have you?" he asked, in a despairing haste, as if he were seeking about for ways to suppress the document.

She broke into an amused giggle, the note he sometimes fancied she kept for him alone.

"Why, yes," she said, "of course I have. I telephoned Mr. Whitney, and he was in a great state over it. He came round, and I gave it to him."

"A lawyer!" said Raven, in disgust. "A damned accurate, precedent-preaching lawyer! Well, the fat's in the fire now. What did you have to be so confounded previous for?"

Nan was smiling at him as if she found herself wiser than he.

"You didn't think you could tear it up, did you, Rookie?" she inquired. "You can't, you know, except in stories."

"I don't know what I thought," he said. "Only I wish it hadn't been done, that's all. It's a"—he ended blankly —"a mistake."

She was looking at him now in a warm, sweet way, to tell him she understood and thanked him.

"You're afraid I sha'n't have enough," she said. "I shall. I'd ever so much rather you had it, Rookie."

"It isn't a question," said Raven curtly, in his disaffection, "of how much you're worth. It's simply yours, that's all, and you've got to have it. Well, I can refuse

it, I suppose. Only that's so boorish. It drags everybody out into the open. What made her! Oh, what made her!"

"I think it's nice," said Nan comfortably. "It seems to make everything so right. As to other people—why, it's telling them, don't you know, you really were the one she cared most about, though she couldn't care quite in the way you wanted her to."

He sat staring at her. What did she mean? What had she made up, in her adequate mind, about his relation to Aunt Anne? She couldn't know how he had fought off the yearly increasing benefits Anne had showered him with, unless indeed Anne had told her. And it wasn't like her. Anne was dignity itself. She kept her own counsel. She took her stately course without the least recognition that there were peculiarities in the pace she kept or the road she chose. She had the unconscious arrogance of her class, a class perhaps, except as surviving in individuals, almost extinct. She never accounted for herself, because it could not have forced its way into her mind, from birth to death, that there was anything in her conduct save the inevitable best, as ordered as the stars. So, Raven knew, she had probably never talked over his nebulous relation with her to Nan; but he was suddenly alive with curiosity to know. He couldn't coax Nan into betraying that confidence, but he was nevertheless set on getting at it somehow. He wondered if it might be decent to do it by direct attack.

"Nan," said he, "just what was my relation to your Aunt Anne? What do you assume it to have been?"

She looked at him as if in reproach, a hurt pride flushing her cheek and giving a sort of wounded appeal to her glance.

"Why," she stumbled, "I know. Of course I know.

Everybody did that heard how long you'd been devoted to her."

This gave him so sharp a pang that it might almost have seemed she had been told off to avenge some of Aunt Anne's wrongs of omission suffered at his hands. He had never been devoted to her, even with his decent show of deference in return for the benefits he had to reject. And now Nan was accusing him of having kept up the relation he had been all his life repudiating, and since Aunt Anne was gone (in the pathetic immunity that shuts the lips of the living as it does those of the dead), he could not repudiate it any more. Nan was looking at him now in her clear-eyed gravity, but still with that unconscious implication of there being something in it all to hurt her personally. The words came as if in spite of her, so impetuously that she might easily not have seen how significant they were:

"There's nothing to be ashamed of in not getting the woman you want, especially with that reason. She adored you, Rookie. I know she did. And it was pretty heroic in her to keep her mind fixed on all those years between you. I wouldn't, I can tell you. Do you s'pose I'd let a matter of fourteen years keep me from the only man? No, sir. Not me."

They sat gazing at each other, she as self-willed as her words and he abjectly afraid of her finding out. Why? He could not have told. But it did seem as if he must protect Anne, in the shadows where she lived now, from the flashing directness of this terrible young glance. It was all he could do for her. It was bad enough to have Nan build up a beautiful dream house of eternal love and renunciation. It was infinitely worse to be the cause of her demolishing it. And as his eyes, in sheer terror of leaving her to reflect any more astutely and produc-

tively on this, held hers, and hers answered back, suddenly he saw a new knowledge dawn in their clear depths. She had somehow read him, underneath his evasions. She knew. And before she could turn that involuntary discovery of hers over in her mind and blur it with some of the discretions he was trying to maintain, she burst out, in the extremity of her wonder:

"Good heavens! I don't believe it was so at all. You weren't in love with her. She was with you, and that was the only way she——" Here she saw the morass her crude candor was leading them both into, and stopped, but not soon enough for him to miss the look of eager relief sprung into her eyes. He turned from her and spoke roughly:

"We don't know what we're talking about. Going into things now—why, it's the merest folly. Haven't we enough to worry over in the matter of the will? That's the thing we've got to meet next."

She had now, he saw, the consciously sweet and warming smile she had for him when she wanted to coax him into doing something or ignoring something she had done.

"I'm in hopes," she said, "you may feel differently after you've read her letter."

"Her letter?" he repeated, as if that were a superadded shock. "What letter?"

"It was in the envelope," said Nan soothingly, "with the will."

"Who's it to?"

He was a writer of English, but his extremity was such that only the briefest slovenliness would serve.

"To you," she said, unclasping her little bag and bringing it out, the familiar superscription uppermost and the very size and texture of the envelope so reminiscent of Anne's unchanging habits that he felt again the pressure of her fine indomitable hand on his.

"Have you," he asked bleakly, "shown that to Whitney?"

"Why, no," said she, in a clear-eyed surprise. "Of course not. It's addressed to you."

She held it out to him and, after a perceptible pause, he took it from her and sat holding it, looking over it into the fire, as if he saw his fate there, or as if he should determine it for himself by tossing the letter in, to be devoured. Then he became aware that Nan was gathering herself up to go. It was rather a mental intimation than anything tangible. She was tight furled, like all the women of that moment of fashion, and had no flying draperies to collect. But he felt her flitting and knew at the same instant that he could not lose her, since, determined as he was to bar her out of the inner recesses of his unfurnished mental prison, where he and the memory of Aunt Anne dwelt so miserably together, it was still a comfort to keep her human presence within call.

"Don't go," he implored her, and she, surprised, settled back, saying:

"No, of course not, if you don't want me to. I thought you'd like to read it straight off. Wouldn't it be easier to read it alone?"

"I don't know whether I can ever read it," said Raven, and then, seeing what a great booby he must sound, he ended savagely: "I'll read it now."

Nan took a paper-knife from the table and offered it to him. Evidently she felt an unformulated tenderness there, a guess that if he tore it open it would seem as if he were somehow tearing at Aunt Anne's vanished and helpless delicacies. Then, as he did not accept the knife, or, indeed, seem to see it, she took the letter from his hand, ran the blade noiselessly under the flap, withdrew

the folded sheets, and gave them to him. Raven, with a little shake of the head, as if he were reminding himself not to be a fool, opened the letter, fixed his attention on it and, without looking up, hurried through the closely written pages. Nan sat as still as an image of silence, and when he had done and she heard him folding the sheets and putting them back into the envelope, she did not look up.

"Well," said he, his voice so harsh and dry that now she did glance at him in a quick inquiry, "it's as bad as it can be. No, it couldn't very well be worse."

Harrying thoughts raced through her mind. Had Aunt Anne reproached him for any friendliness unreturned, any old hurt time had never healed? No, Aunt Anne was too effectually armored by an exquisite propriety. She would have been too proud to make any egotistical demand for herself during life. Assuredly she could not have done it after death. Raven may have guessed what she was thinking.

"No," he said, in the same tone of dry distaste. All at once it seemed he could be definitely allowed to treat himself to a little wholesome rebuttal of Anne and her ways. "It's nothing you could possibly imagine. She leaves the money to me to be used for a certain purpose. She doesn't leave it to any association of the people that think as she does, because she doesn't absolutely trust them never to divert it into some channel she wouldn't approve. She leaves it to me to administer because I know precisely what she means and I'd feel bound to do it in her way and no other."

"But what is the purpose?" Nan asked him. She was thoroughly surprised and very curious. "So it's for a cause. Aren't you glad, Rookie? A minute ago you didn't want it. What is the cause?"

"The cause," said Raven, with infinite distaste, as if it galled him even to say it, "is the cause of Peace."

"Good Lord!" said Nan breathlessly. "O my stars!" She thought of it a moment, and he thought also, and then she gathered herself hopefully. "But, Rookie dear, you believe in peace. You don't have to carry it out in her way. You can carry it out in yours—and mine—and Dick's—we that have seen things over there. Why, bless you, Rookie, it's a great idea. It's a chance: Liberty enlightening the world! a big educational fund, and you to administer it. Cheer up, Rookie dear. It's a chance."

"Oh, no, it's not a chance," said Raven bitterly. "She's seen to that. She's tied me up, hand and foot. It's got to be done in her way, the way she'd been doing it herself since 1914."

"The acutely sentimental?" asked Nan ruthlessly. Then the misery of his face—a look, too, of mortification as if somebody had put him to public shame—hurt her so that she spoke with an impetuous bitterness of her own: "It was a cruel thing to do. Well, it was like her."

Raven put in heavily:

"She never meant to be cruel."

"No," said Nan, "but the whole thing—all the things she had to do with—came out of her being absolutely stupid and absolutely sure she was right."

Raven thought apathetically for a moment. His mind went plodding back over the years of his acquaintance with Anne, as he had never meant it should again. There had been moments, of late, when he wondered if he need ever go back to that guiding hand of hers on his unresponsive life. Of herself, he would have protested, he must have the decency to think. Just now, recurring to that also, he wondered, with a grim amusement, whether

he had perhaps meant to set apart a day for it, say Thursdays from ten to twelve, to think gratefully of Anne. But here he was again at war with her, and the curious part of it seemed to be that he couldn't undertake the warfare with the old, steady, hopeless persistence he had got used to in their past; the mere thought of it had roused him to a certain alarming wildness of revolt.

"Well," he found himself saying to Nan, because there might be a propriety in curbing her impetuous conclusions, "she had a way of being right—conventionally, you might say."

"Was she right about the War?" Nan threw back at him.

"No," he felt obliged to own.

"Is she right about this, trying to fetter you, hand and foot, against what she knew you believed, and banking on your doing it because she's crowded you and rushed you so many times and you've never failed her?"

"Oh, yes," said Raven miserably, "I've failed her often enough."

"But answer me that: was she right when she left you her money to do this fool thing and give the world another kick down hill where the sentimentalists are sending it? Now I ask you, Rookie, was she right?"

"No," he owned again.

"Then," said Nan triumphantly, "you mean she's right about teas and dinners and women's clubs and old portraits and genealogy and believing our family tree was the tree of life. That's what you mean, isn't it, Rookie?"

Raven looked at her, an unhappy smile dawning. He was moderately sure, in his unspoken certainties, that this was what he did mean. She had been the perfect product of a certain form of civilization, her proprieties,

her cruelties even—though, so civilized were they, they seemed to rank only as spiritual necessities.

"I'd rather see a monkey climbing our family tree," said Nan, with a rash irrelevance she hoped might shock him into the reaction of a wholesome disapproval, "than all those stiffs she used to hold up for me to imitate."

"Don't!" said Raven involuntarily. "It would hurt her like the mischief to hear you say a thing like that."

"Why, Rookie," said Nan, with a tenderness for him alone, he saw, not for Aunt Anne, "you act as if she might be—in the room." She kept a merciful restraint on herself there. She had almost said: "You act as if you were afraid she might be in the room."

He sat staring at her from under frowning brows. Was it possible, his startled consciousness asked itself, that the spell of Anne's tenacity of will had not lifted in the least and he did think she might be in the room? Not to intimidate him: he had never feared her. He had been under the yoke, not only of his decent gratitude, but his knowledge of the frightful hurts he could deal her. He wondered what Nan would say if he could tell her that, if he could paint for her the most awful hour in his remembrance, more terrible even than that of seeing his mother suffer under mortal disease, when Anne had actually given way before him, the only time in her ordered life, and accused him of the cruelty of not loving her. This had not been the thin passion of the family portraits smiling down on them from her walls, but the terrible nerve-destroying anguish of a woman scorned. That was one of the things in his life he never allowed himself to think about; but it would, in moments of physical weariness, come beating at the door. He would hear it leave the threshold while he sat, hands clenched and lips shut tight, and go prowling round the house,

peering in at him through the windows, bidding him waken and remember. And when he did find himself forced to remember before he could get out of doors and walk or ride, it was always with an incredulous amazement that he had, in that moment of her downfall, found the courage to withstand her. When the implacable ghost of remembrance flashed on his mind the picture of her, face wet with streaming tears, hands outstretched to him—beautiful hands, the product of five generations of idleness and care—why did he not meet her passion with some decency of response, swear he did love her, and spend the rest of his life in making good? Would a lifetime of dogged endurance be too much for a man to give, to save all this inherited delicacy of type from the ruin of knowing it had betrayed itself and was delicate no more? —the keenest pang it could feel in a world made, to that circumscribed, over-cultured intelligence, for the nurture of such flowers of life. He felt, as he stood there looking despairingly upon her, as if he had seen all the manufactured expensiveness of the world, lustrous silks, bloom of velvet, filigreed jewels, in rags and ruin. Yet there was more, and this it was that had brought enduring remorse to his mind. It was pride. That was in ruins. If she had assaulted him with the reproaches of an unfed passion, there would have been some savage response of rebuttal in him, to save them both from this meager sort of shame. But what could heal in a man's mind the vision of a woman's murdered pride, as deep as the pride of queens, in the days when the world itself bowed its neck for queens to set their feet on? Nan was looking at him curiously. He became aware of it, and returned to himself with a start. He must, he judged, have been acting queerly. It had never happened before that he had been under other eyes when the vision rose to plague him.

"You've been such a long time without speaking," said Nan gently. "What is it, Rookie dear?"

He shook his head. His forehead was damp with the sweat of his renewed remorses.

"There's such a lot of things, Nan," he answered, "that can't be said."

"Yes," she agreed, "that's true. Want me to go home?"

He didn't want her to go home. He caught at her dear presence. Almost he wished he might tell her how horrible it was, not only to repudiate Anne's last request of him, but to feel he was repudiating it on the heels of that other refusal years ago.

"No, dear," he said, "not yet. I'll go with you when you must."

"I don't believe," Nan ventured, "it's as bad as you think. She did do some foolish things," she meditated, "these last years."

"She did some hideous things," said Raven, "because they weren't normal. They weren't decent. And so they weren't right."

"Maybe I don't know so much as you do about them," said Nan. "You see she was so furious with me for going to France——"

"Oh, don't say she was furious," urged Raven, still out of that sense of her being in the room. "It would hurt her so confoundedly."

"Well, she was, you see," said Nan. "I thought you knew about it. But I remember, you'd gone. And when I told her I was going over, she was furious. Oh, she was, Rookie! You can't say anything else. I know Aunt Anne."

"But just cut out some of the adjectives," said Raven, still with that sense of Anne's being in the room and the

unsportsmanlike business of putting her in her place when she could not, even from her place, defend herself. "She never was furious. She simply didn't believe in war and she wouldn't join any relief work and didn't want you to."

"She wouldn't join any relief work," said Nan, relentlessly rehearsing. "She said the most frightful things and said them publicly. She ought to have been arrested, only they didn't take the trouble. She wasn't a Quaker. There was nothing inbred to excuse her. We're decent folks, Rookie, we Hamiltons. But she stood for non-resistance. She said Belgium shouldn't have resisted, and England shouldn't have gone in, and France shouldn't have lifted a finger or thrown a bomb, and when you told her—that is, I told her—she was crazy, she said something awful."

Raven was startled out of his determination to show no curiosity.

"What did she say?" he asked. "What was it that was awful?"

Nan seemed to have paled a little under the rose-leaf texture of her cheek.

"Why, you know," she said, "what they all come back to. Whatever they believe, they come back to that. I don't see how they can. I couldn't, it scares me so. They tell you what He said—Christ."

Raven sat looking at her, wondering absently, in the unregarded depths of his mind, how they could go on with a talk that was ploughing deeper and deeper and yet could get nowhere in the end. For certainly they were both mercifully bent on saving Anne, and Anne, under this shadow of her latest past, herself would not let them.

"She absolutely forbade my going to France," said Nan, this with no special feeling, but as if she had dwelt

on it until there was no emotion left to put into it. "She said it was notoriety I wanted. I told her I'd scrub floors over there, if they wanted me to. It proved I did, too, you know. I did it remarkably well. And then she said she forbade me, and I reminded her I was of age and had my own money. And I went."

Raven nodded. He thought they had said enough, but Nan's calm impartiality did rest him. It was something he could not himself attain.

"And now," said Nan, "she wants you to keep on doing the fool things she'd have done then, if they'd let her. She probably wants to get up a big scheme of propaganda and put it into the schools. And every blessed boy and girl in this country is to be taught not to serve the truth and do his job but—safety first."

"Yes," said Raven, drearily "I suppose that's about it."

"But actually," said Nan, suddenly aware that he had not told her, "what does she say? Does she specify? What does she say?"

"She says," Raven answered, in a toneless voice, glancing at the letter but making no movement toward sharing it with her more definitely, "that her money is to build a Palace of Peace—she doesn't say where—for lectures, demonstrations of the sort I know she approves, all the activities possible in the lines she has been following—for the doctrine of non-resistance and the consequent abolishment of war."

Again he ended drearily.

"Well," said Nan, "what are you going to do about it? going to spend your life and the lives of a lot of more or less intelligent pacifists teaching children to compute the number of movies they could go to for the money spent on one battleship——"

"But, good God, Nan!" Raven broken in, "you and I don't want to preach war."

"No," said Nan, "but we can't let Aunt Anne preach peace: not her brand, as we've seen it. O Rookie! what's the use of taking the world as it isn't? Why don't we see if we can't make something of the old thing as it is and has been? and blest if I don't believe as it always will be?"

Raven looked at her in a maze of interrogation. Was this the fragility of girlhood speaking, or was it womanhood, old as time itself, with the knowledge of good and evil? She answered the look.

"No," she said, "I'm not a kid. Don't think it. I suppose it's because I've seen—life."

The pause before the last word, the drop on the word itself was not from bitterness, he knew. But it was sad.

"Well," he said irrepressibly, "you've seen life, and what do you think of it?"

She hesitated. Then she put out her hand and touched the petal of a rose, one of a great dome of splendor in a bowl.

"I like—roses," she said whimsically.

She looked at him with that most moving look of a lovely face: the knitted brows of rueful questioning, the smiling lips. Raven, staring back at her, felt a sudden impulse to speak, to tell. It was the form of her reply that invited him.

"I don't believe, Nan," he said, "I even care about roses. I don't care about the whole infernal scheme. That's what I sent for Dick for—to tell him. Practically, you know I should have to tell Dick. And I haven't done it and now I'm telling you."

III

Nan sat looking at him with an air of patient alertness, ready, he saw, to meet what he had to say and do the best she could with it. He had an irritated apprehension that, as her work through the last few years had lain chiefly in meeting emergencies, so now he was an emergency. And as Dick, poet though the inner circle of journalism had listed him, might not understand in the least what he was driving at, so there was danger of Nan's understanding too quickly and too much, with the resultant embarrassment of thinking something could be done. And nothing could be done beyond the palliatives he meant to allow himself. He would try her. He might see how far she would insist on going with him along his dreary way. What if she had Anne's over-developed and thwarted maternity of helpfulness? What if she insisted on going all the way and never leaving him to the blessed seclusion of his own soul?

"You see, Nan," he adventured, "I'm sick of the whole show."

She nodded.

"Yes," she said, "I know. Coming back. Finding we aren't any better than we were before we got frightened and said our prayers and promised God if He'd stop the War we'd be different forever and ever, amen. That's it, Rookie, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," said Raven, staring at her, she seemed so

accurate, according to his own mental gauging, and so unmoved in her flippancy, "that's pretty nearly it."

She nodded at him again, whether to hearten him or to assure him of their perfect unison he could not tell.

"It was an awful jolt, wasn't it?" she inquired frankly. "You know, I should think it might make some of them laugh, the ones they say observe us from—where is it from? Mars? up in the heavens somewhere. It's like reading a bitter sort of book. It is funny. Rookie, don't you think it's funny?"

Raven remembered a character in Mr. Owen Wister's "Virginian," the hen crazed by her thwarted destiny.

"Well," he said, quoting "The Virginian," "not so damned funny either. But how the dickens did you know what I was going to say?"

"Because it's what we've all come back to," said she, "and what everybody that stayed at home feels, or ought to if they've got anything inside their nuts. Just think, Rookie! we were like the great multitude in the Bible, somewhere, praising God. We broke our idols and—I don't know what we didn't do. And now we're not scared any more, we've set 'em up again: same old idols. Rookie, I bet you the only reason we ever sacrificed to God at all was because we thought He was the biggest joss and things were so desperate and all, we'd better make a sure thing of it. And now we think we aren't in any particular danger, seems as if the little gods would do, same as they did before; and they're not so expensive."

"Goodness, Nan!" said Raven, "how naughty you are. You didn't use to run on so."

"I haven't talked very much to you," said Nan drily, "not since I grew up."

He knew it was true, and knew also that the reason

was, if she had allowed her lips to utter it, "Aunt Anne wouldn't let me."

"But," she said, "I don't understand altogether. I know you're mad and discouraged and all the rest of it. But I don't see what Dick has got to do with it."

"It's simply this," said Raven. "I'm going away."

She looked at him in what seemed to be serious alarm.

"Relief work?" she asked. "Reconstruction?"

"No," said Raven. "I don't believe I should be any good to them. There isn't a blamed thing I can do, so far as I see, except for what money I've got. I'm no good, Nan. I shouldn't sell for my hide and horns. And I hate the whole blamed show. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of the system, from the beasts that devour one another to the rest of us. And I'm simply going to desert. I'm going to run away."

"Where?" asked Nan. "You can't run away from the earth."

"No," said Raven, "I can't jump off. So I'm going to do the next convenient thing. I'm going up to Wake Hill and shovel snow with Jerry, and maybe get into the woods and do some thinning out and, if I remember anything about the millennium we've just shaved the edge of, just say to myself there ain't a-going to be no millenium, so I can shut up."

"You've taken advice, haven't you?" she concluded. "That's what they've prescribed. I suppose it's all right."

"Good God, no!" said Raven. "Do you think I've been to a doctor and turned myself inside out? I'm going because Wake Hill is as far out of the world as I can manage. If the whole earth hadn't gone crazy, I'd cut stick for Tartary or some confounded place that isn't on the map. But they're all on the map. There isn't an inch of ground that isn't under some sort of moral searchlight.

No, I'll be hanged if it's moral. It's only the mites in the cheese getting busy and stirring up fermentation."

Nan laughed out and then looked up at him in her rueful apology.

"I couldn't help it," she said. "I thought of Dick, your telling him. Dick's just got his book ready for the printer: Democracy, you know, in three-legged verse. And they'll say it's full of insight and prophecy. That's what they said about the other one: insight, prophecy! But Dick won't have the least idea what you're driving at."

"You see," said Raven, "he's thinking of doing some stiff work and getting a degree: a sort of sop to his mother. She's as wild as a hawk, you know, to get him to distinguish himself, doesn't much care how. I'd meant to ask him to camp here with me this winter. I believe I did actually ask him, now I think of it."

"Yes, you did," said Nan. "It'll make a lot of difference to him, your being away."

"I don't think so," said Raven. "Anyhow, he'll have to get used to it, especially as I'm not merely going away. I'm getting out, out of the business and all."

He was really surprising her now. She had grown up in the atmosphere of belief in that particular business. When a Hamilton said his earthly creed, he would have begun, if he had been honest, "I believe in wool."

"You're not retiring?" she hesitated.

"Yes."

"Made your pile, Rookie?"

At once they thought of Anne and the new complication she had saddled him with.

"That isn't the question," he evaded. "The amount of it is, I couldn't go to the office every morning and come home and go the next day, without—well, Nan, frankly,

going off my nut. I hate it. I hate the whole business of what we call civilized life. I even think of giving Dick power of attorney and passing all my stuff over into his hands.

"Oh, no," said Nan quickly, "you mustn't do that."

He frowned at her, perplexedly.

"Don't you trust him?" he asked. "Don't you trust Dick?"

"Of course I trust Dick," said she impatiently, "his intentions, that is."

"You ought to," said Raven. "You're bound to, the man you're going to marry."

She kept her eyes on him, but she said nothing. And suddenly Raven realized that he wanted to know about this business of marrying Dick. He wanted to know tremendously. Yet, though this was the little Nan who sometimes used to seem more his child than anybody's, he could not ask her. She looked difficult, if not wayward.

"Well," he compromised, "that's about where it is. I'm going into the country, to get away from the clack of men. My income, all but the little of it I set aside for food and taxes, will go to France. It may go through Dick or it may—— Oh, well, well," he added, seeing the quick rebuttal again on her face, "that hasn't got to be decided in a hurry. But ultimately it goes to France."

"Why France?" asked Nan. "I see, though. They're all deserting her."

"It isn't altogether that," said Raven, as if he hadn't finished thinking it out. "It's because I believe in her so tremendously, that quick intelligence of hers. She mustn't be downed, mustn't be kept depleted. It's a loss too horrible to face. She sees the world as it is. She knows the dangers. She's got to be protected from them, so she can go on seeing."

"What does she see?" asked Nan curiously. "What kind of thing?"

"Everything. Life. When it comes to what the collective brain can do, you can't limit her. You never'll make her believe in miracles, but she can find out how they're done."

"Mercy!" said Nan. "You talk like a book."

"Notes, for an essay: 'France.' I've been thinking 'em out. How she ought to be given a hand, so she doesn't have to spend the next thirty years or so outwitting the German devil. That's hard sledding for her beautiful intelligence. She ought to be safe, so she can turn it to other things: the science of living, hers, ours, everybody's."

"Ah," said Nan, "but they'll tell you it won't be for everybody: only France."

"That's the point," said Raven. "It's a gamble. But they can't deny she's got the beautiful intelligence. I can trust anything so perfect. I trust it absolutely."

"Why don't we do it ourselves? Build a fire under us, Rookie. Come on!"

"We aren't homogeneous," said Raven. "We've no race spirit, no live nerve through the whole of us. France has. That mind of hers, that leaping intelligence! If she were as holy as she is keen, she'd make the world the poets dreamed of."

"Then go to it," said Nan. "Turn in your money. I will mine. Stump you!"

"Not yet," said Raven. "You sit tight and see how I come out. I haven't got enough to set the Seine afire, but such as it is, I'd like to turn it over to her for what she needs most: agriculture, schools, research. Administered so it could be withdrawn if she didn't make good and turned in somewhere else. Oh, it's a gamble! I told

you it was. But administered, mind you. That's the point."

"Through Dick," she commented, plainly with dissatisfaction. "Now, why Dick?"

"Because," said Raven, "Dick's got a head for organizing. He's his father over again, plus the Raven streak. And the Raven streak doesn't do him any harm. It isn't soft, like Old Crow—and me. It's his mother in him, and she takes back—but O Lord! what's the sense of going into that?"

"Anyhow," said Nan, with decision, "you keep your affairs in your own hands."

"For the present, yes," said Raven. "And I do want to think it out in detail. I can do it at Wake Hill. I shall get on my pins enough for that."

"Isn't it funny?" said she. "Aunt Anne with her Palace of Peace and you with your invincible France. But, Rookie, you hear to me. Whatever you do with your own money, you do it your own way. Don't be a slacker."

Raven sat looking at her, a slow smile dawning. He rather liked Nan's taking him in hand.

"That's it, is it?" he asked, with a relish she was glad to see. "A slacker! so be it. If I'm a slacker, I am. I'm a conscientious objector. What I object to is the universe, the pattern it's made on. I object to the way we're running it, and, being made as we are, I don't see how we can be expected to do anything but what we're doing. It's a perfectly logical proposition. And except for a few minor chores I've got to see to, I simply won't play."

Nan was thinking. She looked down at her hands, lying in her lap. Raven looked at them also and wondered, as he often had, since they came home, how such hands could have done the tasks she set them to. She

looked up and met his eyes gravely with something imperative in hers. It is a way women have sometimes. They seem to be calling on the boy in man and bidding him take heed.

"I wouldn't," said she, "talk to Dick about going to Wake Hill."

"What would you do? Cut stick, and let him wonder what in the deuce it's all about?"

"I wouldn't talk; I'd write."

"Oh, write!—what's the difference?"

"If you talk, he'll say something that'll shut you up and you'll be just as far apart as you are to-day. If you write, you can tell him as much as you want to and no more. And the first thing he'll do will be to bring the letter to me."

"I see," said Raven. "And you'll interpret."

"I'll interpret. I can, Rookie. I know you, don't I? and I know Dick."

"You ought to," said Raven rashly again because he was again curious, "the man you're going to marry."

"Yes," said Nan calmly, rising, "the man I'm going to marry. Only"—her face, as she turned it to him, brimmed over with a childish sort of fun—"don't tell him that, Rookie. It's perfectly true I haven't promised him. And I don't mean to—yet."

"Quite right," said Raven, rising. He felt a distinct relief. He, too, wanted to see what Dick would make of himself. "You do your own telling."

"There he is," said Nan, "just as it is in a play. We've got to a climax and he comes in at the door. But, Rookie——" She stopped, for Dick was nearing in the hall, and Raven knew what she would have said. It was in both their minds. They hadn't finished their talk. It had merely strayed into another channel, or bolted and

run away there. Aunt Anne's money and her Palace of Peace still stared them in the face. Dick put his head in at the door. He looked rather sheepish, as if his dignified going had been invalidated by this impetuous coming back, as if he couldn't live without Nan and she was bound to see through it.

"Well?" he said gruffly. "Talked out?"

They both laughed, with the sudden absurdity of it. How should they, their eyes questioned each other, ever be talked out, what with Aunt Anne and the universe and France?

"Absolutely," said Nan. "Good night, Rookie. Going to write your letter? Come on, Dick."

IV

Raven sat down at the table and began his letter. He was wrestling with it at once, to give himself no time to argue over the point of its being no ordinary letter such as he had been accustomed to write to Dick. He began with the succinct statement of what he meant to do. He had made all his arrangements for getting out of the business. They could be concluded in short order. As to the business itself, he had no complaint to make. The old man—he permitted himself this indulgence as he never could have in Anne's lifetime, as touching her father—the old man had been square all through. He was as good as they make 'em. But there was nothing for him, Raven, in the concern except its cumulative capacity for making money. He'd no traditional pride in it, as the old man had. He'd worked for all he was worth, to squeeze every drop he could out of it so that his mother—"your grandmother, you know, Dick"—might have every last luxury she wanted. Well, she'd had 'em, though one of the ironical things about it was that she didn't want so very many, and he needn't have worked so hard or so long. However, that's neither here nor there. What's done is done. The War's done—they say—and the thing that would please Raven best would be—— Here he brought up with a full stop. He was running into dangerous revelations, going back to a previous state of mind, one he had begun cherishing as soon as his mother died, and even

caressed, with a sort of denied passion, when Anne also died, and he felt so shamefacedly free. All his life he had wanted to wander, to explore, to bruise himself against the earth and pick himself up and go on and get bruised again. He loved the earth, he wanted her, in her magnificence and cruelty, wanted to write about her, and make the portrait of her for stay-at-homes who weren't adventurous and were content with reading about her in the blank moments after the office grind. Yet he was a stay-at-home himself. Why? in God's name why?

He asked himself the question, as he sat with lifted pen, almost the words dropping off it, to tell Dick the things it would be simply disconcerting to know. Raven saw, with a sad clearness, why he hadn't written the books he wanted to about the earth. They would have been rough books, full of rock and clay and the tumbling of rivers and thunder grumbling in the clouds. If he had been really afraid of Anne and her ordered ambitions for him, he could have printed them under an assumed name. She need never have known at all. They wouldn't have been the books he could have written if he had been foot-loose and gone blundering along in strange trails over the earth, but they might have held something of the sort his inner man wanted to fashion. And if the secret of them had been kept, they needn't have interfered with his smug little folk stories Anne and her women's clubs prized so much. Had he been actually afraid of Anne? Was he one of the men who are shamefully under the feminine finger, subject to mother, subject to wife, without the nerve—scarcely the wish, indeed—to break away? He was not afraid of his mother, or, if he had been, it was the fear of hurting her who had been so hurt already. Ever since he could remember, he saw himself, even as a little boy, trying to get her away from his father who

had a positive cast of mind, a perfect certainty of being right and a confirmed belief that robust measures always were the thing. If you did wrong, you were to be punished, promptly and effectually. If you were afraid of the dark, and came downstairs in your nightgown upon the family sitting by the lamp, you were whaled for it, to teach you there was something worse than bed even in the dark. If you said your head ached and you couldn't eat bacon and greens, which father elected to consider a normal dish, you were made to eat a lot with no matter what dire result, because there wasn't a physical ill which couldn't be mended by treating it robustly. He was God. He knew. And he was perfectly well and had never once for half a minute entered into those disordered cells of bodily ill where the atom cries to its Creator in an anguish of bewilderment and pain. And when his body met the fate appointed for its destruction, as all bodies must, and he was brought home broken after the runaway that made him a thing almost too terrible to look upon, except by eyes so full of compassion that they love the more, Raven, then a very little John, found himself wondering how it seemed to father now. Even runaways, father had appeared to think, could always be governed, if you kept your head.

They never knew what he thought. He died quickly, under opiates, and John believed his mother was so thankful for the merciful haste of it that she could not, until long after, recall herself to mourn. And she did honestly mourn. The little John was glad of that. So ill and tired had she been for years and yet so bound upon the rack of her husband's Spartan theories for her, that John thought he could not have borne it if she had not adored her righteous tormentor, if she had had to look on him as her master, not her lord by love. It seemed to him

he was always mourning over his mother, in those days, always lying awake and wondering if she were awake, too, always trying to save her from some task too heavy for her and too heavy for him also, so that, if she were to be saved, it had to be by stratagem. But stratagem was difficult in that house, because his older sister, who became Dick's mother, was of her father's temperament, always perfectly well and also an inferior god who knew at every point what to do, and she had not merely imbibed father's certainty that the only thing mother needed was to take a brace: she had it by nature. And when, father being gone to heaven—and John, young John now, not little any more, made no doubt he had gone, it pleased mother so to say it and be obligingly agreed with—Amelia, his sister, took her departure, on the night of her marriage with a very prosperous Mr. Powell, for the middle west, John Raven, then beginning his apprenticeship to wool, danced a fantastic fling in the sitting-room where the wedding gifts still lay displayed and whooped with emotion at last let loose. His mother, in the gray silk and commendable lace Amelia had selected and he had paid for, did smile unwillingly, but she spoke to him in the reproving tone which was the limit of severity his boyhood had known from her and which he had learned, in those earliest days, meant nothing at all:

"I'd be ashamed! Any one would think you were glad your sister had gone!"

John did not say he was glad. He knew too much to stir up loyal reactions in mother's conscience. He simply wove a dance of intricate mazes about her, as she sat in her chair, and his inner mind was one pæan of thanksgiving to God, not the spurious gods who had been his father and sister, but the mysterious Deity who had, for obscure purposes, called them into being, because now

John had at last full swing and could let mother out of bondage. What difference did it make that he wasn't trekking through darkest Africa or being hunted by the jungle in India, so long as mother was out of bondage? He even took his allegiance to Anne rather lightly, those first years, he was so absent-minded about everything but hypnotising mother into thinking she was going to be very happy and live a long time doing it. And that was the part of his life when there seemed to be a great deal of it, and if he didn't have a thing now there would be plenty of chances to snatch at it later. He had simply been eaten up, the energy of him, the will, perhaps, by compassion. And then his mother had died and he knew he could have done no more for her than he had done, and while he was turning round to look about him—and ah! in that lean year came Anne's horrible accusation that he did not love her!—the War broke out, and he felt himself shocked into action. The very atoms of his body seemed to fall asunder and rearrange themselves and, as soon as he could decently get away, without throwing the bewilderment of the business on Anne, he had gone, and he had never seen her again.

He had written to her faithfully, and with the compassion that was either natally or by the habit of life a part of him, but he had not obeyed her. For she begged him, almost, at intervals, commanded him, to return to work with her for the peace of mankind. At first he tried to explain himself and assuage her grief over what she called his desertion of their common ideals. He answered the arguments in the letters that had become a misery to him to receive as his had become an inexpressible burden to write. Finally, with a wrench to himself, he ceased, and, with infinite pains, compiled data that might interest without offending her. The letters con-

tinued, but as soon as he found she was sending him abstractions valueless because they had no roots in the living issues of things, he had to stop. That, not her death, had been their lasting farewell.

What, in the name of all that was mysterious, he reflected, had made Anne—and so early—assume the burden of an unasked allegiance to him? His family and hers had been next-door neighbors at Wake Hill, but on no equality of worldly footing. The Hamiltons, thriving on wool, had been able to buy for themselves all the picturesque luxuries of civilized life. Their women toiled not. Their delicate air was the product of tuition in dainty ways. Their men had acquired the unconscious pose of dominance, of knowing what was their due and expecting to get it without argument. Sometimes up there at Wake Hill they did receive a disconcerting knock or two from some "embattled farmer" whom they called "my man," and who didn't like the sound of it. But the answering rebuff never penetrated the fine mail of their acquired arrogance. It meant, they smilingly said, "New England," and tolerantly passed it by. Raven's people were of a different stripe, "brainy," he thought with an unspoken pride of his own, yet deficient in a certain practical quality of taking the world "but as the world," and consequently always poor. Their ways were rougher ways. Their women had to work to trim the edges of their plainer surroundings with the alleviating prettinesses the Hamiltons cast aside with every changing style. And Anne, coming home from Europe one summer, where she had not only seen wonder and beauty, already familiar to her—for she was a young lady then—and where he knew she had met men and women whose names were trumpet calls in his ears—singled him out, in his shyness and obscurity, and offered him the key to the fulfilment

of his dreams. Education, travel, the life of books—all were in her hand, the potential fruit of her father's doting affection for her, and all were to be his. What could have inspired her with so wholesale and fantastic a philanthropy? He could never adequately guess, and he was no nearer doing it now than in the old bewildering days when the Hesperidean apples were dropping over him and he was, from some shy instinct, dodging to avoid them. And the reason he had never guessed and never could guess was that he left out of all the data at his hand the one first moving factor: that he was a beautiful youth and Anne had imperiously loved him and had never ceased to love.

As he sat there, the pen lifted, his mind going back over the things that had led him away from adventure into wool, and were now leading him as far from wool as might be, he was tempted. What if, in spite of Nan, he should risk it and tell Dick, once for all, why he was going away, make it clear so there should be no after-persuasions, no clutter of half understanding? He was tired of thinking about his life as a life. The temptation to such morose musing had come upon him in the last six months, and once yielded to, he felt the egotistical disease of it through his very blood and bones. If he were Catholic, he could confess and get rid of it. He was not Catholic, only pagan, the natural man. The Church had a wisdom of her own. All her rites and ceremonies found their root in something salutary for the human mind. Confession was salutary. You might not be absolved, but if you were pagan you could believe that the very act of it absolved you. Nan said Dick never would understand. So much the better. Let him carry off the burden of it. If he understood, he'd see the extreme sacredness of a confidence entrusted to him. If

he didn't, he'd hide it as a thing you'd better say as little about as possible. So he tucked his first letter into its envelope and began to write again, with no date and no direct address, but from a sense that it was going to be an enormously comforting thing to do.

V

"I think I'll tell you the real reason why I'm going to Wake Hill. I've told you I'm going, but just as my nerves move the muscles that move my legs to go, so my will moves my nerves and the me that is inside somewhere and is a perfect stranger to you—and also to the me I am used to myself—moves my will. You see, the me inside me knows there's something wrong. Something mighty bad—or it may be merely inevitable—has happened to me. I went through the War all right, on a pretty even keel, because I thought I saw a bright light at the end. I thought we all saw the light. And the light wasn't any electric signboard out to say there never would be any more wars, but it was a light you could see to read by. You could see the stars and see them differently from the old way we'd been seeing them. We could see the moon and the Milky Way—but I suppose that comes under stars—and the upshot of it was that we thought we saw God. And after you'd seen God, you knew saying there shouldn't be any more war was only beginning at the wrong end of the puzzle. Of course war is a damnable business, perhaps the most damnable we go into because it's so wholesale. But if you begin at the right end of the puzzle and not the wrong, the thing we learn is that the only reality in this universe for which it's worth going through the obscene hells of which war is one, is God. To be aware of Him, not to explain Him. You can't explain Him. You can't explain

what He's done to you or means to do. All you can do is to keep your eye on Him and fall in.

"I came home. I was rather cracked, when I got here, I was so pleased with my little plaything. I'd seen God. I was only one of a good many millions that saw Him. And it was exactly as if you went into an enchanter's cave and expected to find some dream you'd dreamed made real, and all you found was the Forty Thieves sitting there counting over their spoils. No! no! it isn't an allegory. I don't mean America and profiteers. I don't mean anybody particularly. But it began to come over me more and more every day that we and everybody else on the round world, if they had seen God, had forgotten all about it. Just as the old-fashioned men at Wake Hill used to read their Bible Sunday and put it away on the parlor table with the album and go out early Monday morning to carry the apples to market all deaconed on top. By George! we were the same old lot. And worse, for we'd had our look through the peep-hole into eternities, and now we said, 'It makes my eyes ache. I'm going to wear a shade.' No, son, I don't mean Leagues of Nations and Internationalism or any of the quack remedies. I mean just God. We'd been badly scared—Nan said so to-day—and we got down on our knees and howled to the Highest and offered Him tribute.

"Now you may say that even if the whole world had forgotten God, if I'd seen Him why couldn't I still remember Him? Why couldn't I consider the millions of years that go to the making of man and do my little bit and wait on His will? Because my temptation came on me. I was tempted in the wilderness of my own credulity and conceit. For I looked back over time past and I said like Solomon—I don't know whether he ever said it, but he's the most blasé Johnnie I remember—'All is vanity.'

As it was in the beginning, so it ever shall be. We are not made in the image of God. We are made rather grotesquely out of dust, and to dust we shall return, all our hopes, all our aspirations, all the pretty plans we form for defeating death and time. And who made us and put us on this dark planet where it is next to impossible to see a step before us? God. Who is responsible for us? God. Can we find out His will? Never. Can we hope for any alleviation of misery on our dark planet? Never: for if we seek out many inventions to down disease and poverty, we shall unloose as many by-products of discovery and bring new plagues upon us. And so I had to turn away from God. Do you see? I didn't deny He exists. I didn't accuse Him of bad faith to us. How can He show either good faith or bad when He has made us no promises? He has merely set us on the dark planet and forced us to whirl with it on the wheel of time. And so, do you see, having turned away from God—and I had to, I had to in mere honesty—I simply lost Him. And having lost Him, there is nothing left to lose. Also, having once seen Him and then lost Him, I can't take up the puzzle again. I can't play the game. If I hadn't what we New Englanders call common sense, I suppose I should put an end to myself. What would be the good? He would simply catch me, like a rabbit out of a cage, and chuck me back again on the dark planet. Don't think I blame Him. He wouldn't do it out of cruelty. He'd have to put me back. That's the way His laws are made. So I'm going up to Wake Hill and live with Charlotte and Jerry, and see if I can't get tired enough every day to sleep at night. I couldn't keep on here. I couldn't. What we call civilization is too sickening to me. I should simply go off my nut. And when you come to that, it's an awful complica-

tion, besides the suffering of it. That I shrink from, too. I'm talking a good deal, but actually it's the thing I least want to do. I don't want a fuss."

Here he paused, wondered if he had more to say, thinking Dick must be unusually dull, even for a poet, if he couldn't understand such a plain state of things, and then took an irrational satisfaction in carefully folding these last pages and putting them in the envelope with what he had written first. He addressed the envelope to Dick, sealed and weighed it, got up and stretched himself and felt distinctly better. He had, in a way, confessed, and it was having the effect on him he had so sagely anticipated. He could sleep to-night. And he did sleep. It was one of the nights he used to have after long tramps about Wake Hill, when his tired legs thrilled deliciously before they sank into a swoon of nothingness.

In the morning, he leaped the chasm from four to six, a wakeful misery of late, when he was accustomed to go over and over the last harassing pages in his book of doubts. He did not wake until seven, and then it was with a clear-eyed resumption of consciousness. And here he was, exactly as he had found himself on other mornings when the bath of oblivion had not been so deep. Here was his world, the world he was trying to run away from, waiting for him in all its ordered hostilities. Immediately it struck him full in the center that, instead of having something less to brood upon by reason of his confession to Dick, he had saddled himself with more. He had the letter itself to repent of. He had given, not his unhappiness but his actual self away, and, no matter how clearly Dick understood, he had conjured up another anguish in admitting to his disordered inner world the lenses of another mind. This was only a matter of a second's disconcerting

thought. It was also immediately clear to him that the letter must not go, and he spoke from his bedside to the kitchen and gave orders that nothing should be mailed until he came down. A contrite voice replied. The letters were mailed: that is, the thick one on the library table. Mary had gone in last night to lock the windows, and saw it, and knew he had forgotten to leave it in the hall. He often did forget. It was stamped and sealed. And the furnace man came then. Raven thought he might, in another minute, be groaning into her sympathetic ear; so he shut her up with an assurance that it was all right. But he felt the sweat start on his forehead at the picture of Dick sitting down to breakfast—Dick always ordered a big breakfast, having a hunter's appetite and a general impression that, the more he nourished himself, the more manly it would make his nose—and poring over the fable of his uncle's soul, or what seemed to be his soul, with eyes strained to their limit of credulity. However, it was of no use. Nothing was of any use when destiny had one of those ironic fits of hers and sat down to make a caricature of you, just for the fun of bursting her old sides over it. He dressed in a dogged haste, wondering if he'd better telephone Dick and ask him not to open any letter he might have from him that morning, and then dismissing it, because it had assuredly been received and Dick was now absorbing it with his chops and eggs.

Raven went down to his own eggs in a grim and sulky frame of mind. He would repudiate the letter, if need be, tell Dick it was only something he had written as a literary experiment and thought he'd try it on the dog. But the moment he heard the boy's key in the door and then his step through the hall, he knew he could not, for some unexplained reason inherent in his own frame of mind, "put it over." It was as if Dick represented the universe Raven

was arraigning, was counsel for it, so to speak, and Raven had got, in sheer decency of honor, to stand to his guns. But it was all worse than he thought. Dick's entrance was so quick, his onslaught so unstudied, his glance so full of alarmed commiseration, that Raven saw at once he had been shocked out of all manly proprieties. Dick caught at a chair, on the way to the table, brought it with him and, placing it at a near angle to Raven's, dropped into it as if exhausted.

"I'd no idea," he began, "why, I'd no more idea——"

Raven's hand tightened on his fork. Then he laid the fork down, for, after all, he had finished breakfast, and might as well make the most of running his hands into his pockets and shutting them there.

"Morning, Dick," he said. "Have in some toast and eggs?"

Dick, in no mind even to weigh the significance of toast and eggs, was staring at him. He was cheated by a poverty of words when he most needed them, and could only repeat:

"I hadn't the least idea. I tell you it never occurred to me. I don't believe it did to Nan, either."

"What?" asked Raven. "What is it that didn't occur to you?"

"I did think of it when you first spoke of going to France, you know," said Dick, in a justification of himself that seemed more for his own ease than Raven's. "I didn't believe you could pull it off, a man of your years. You took it so easy! You never turned a hair. But I might have known you'd have to pay for it afterward."

"What is it I've taken so admirably?" asked Raven. "What is it I've got to pay for?"

"Why," said Dick, "your slogging over there—a man of your age——"

"Well," said Raven curtly, cracking his voice at him in a way Dick had never had to take from him, "how is it I'm paying? What's the matter with me?"

"Why," said Dick, in a perfect innocence of any offense in it, "don't you know? You've seen enough of it. I should think you'd be the first to know."

Raven simply looked at him. Dick had a feeling that his uncle was about to roar out something, and braced himself for the unbelievable event. However, it would not surprise him. That, he knew, was a part of it. But Raven was putting his question again, smoothly and tolerantly, as if to assure him there was time enough to make a well considered reply:

"Just what, in your opinion, is the matter with me?"

"Why," said Dick, that innocent gaze still upon him, "shell shock."

Raven jumped. Every nerve in him seemed to give a little twitch of pure surprise with every other.

"O Lord!" said he. "Who could ever have expected that? It's worse than I thought."

"Why, it's no disgrace," Dick assured him eagerly. "Think how many fellows have had it. They haven't got over it. They're having it now. The only thing to do is to recognize it and put yourself under treatment."

"That'll do," said Raven, with a determined calm. "Your diagnosis has gone far enough. And now I shall have to ask you to do two things for me."

"Two!" Dick echoed, and Raven, though at the end of his patience, was touched to see the suffused look of the boy's eyes. "You needn't cut it down to two. Just you tell me——"

There, though he was poetically eloquent and diffuse in print, he stopped and could literally say no more without an emotion he considered unworthy of him.

"Two things," said Raven. "One is to forget every blamed word of the screed I was jackass enough to send you. The other is to give me your word you won't mention it, even to me. Oh, there's another thing. Go home and burn the thing up."

Dick's eyes were all a wild apprehension.

"Oh," said he, "I can't burn it. I haven't got it."

"You haven't it? Who has?"

"Nobody—not yet."

"Oh, then you've destroyed it already."

"No," said Dick miserably. "I've sent it off."

"Who to? Nan?"

"No. Mother."

Raven could hardly believe him. He did not remember any illuminating confidences from Dick on the subject of mother, but he made no doubt the boy looked upon her as he did, as a force too eccentrically irresponsible to be unloosed.

"Well!" he said. The state of things struck him as too bad to be taken otherwise than calmly. You couldn't spend on it the amount of emotion it deserved, so you might as well get the credit with yourself and your antagonist of an attack unexpectedly gentle. "Now, what did you think you were doing when you sent it off to your mother?"

"Uncle Jack," said Dick, rather awkwardly blundering about his mental armory for some reasonable defense, "she's your sister."

"Yes," said Raven, "Milly is my sister. What then?"

"Then, why, then," said Dick, "when a thing like this happens to you, she'd feel it, wouldn't she?"

"You're perfectly sure you know what has happened to me? You trust your own diagnosis?"

"Of course I trust it," Dick burst forth. "Your letter

—why, your letter isn't normal. Shell shock's a perfectly legitimate thing. You know it is. You're just the one to be hit. You did perfectly crazy things over there, entirely beyond any man of your years. And I'm mighty thankful we can put our finger on it. For if it isn't shell shock, it's something worse."

"You mean," said Raven, "I've gone off my nut."

Dick did not answer, but there could be no doubt of his own mental excitement, and he was apprehensive in a measure that moved Raven to an amused compassion. Raven sat looking at him a long minute. Then he got up and took his newspaper from the table beside him.

"Come," he said. "We'll go into the library and see if we can get anywhere."

Dick followed him, and they sat down together by the fire, this after Raven had moved a third chair into the space between them. He smiled at himself as he did it. It was the chair Nan had sat in the night before. He had a foolish feeling that he was invoking her remembered presence, calling on her to help them out.

"Now, Dick," he began, when they were seated, "you said something about my letter's not being normal. What is normal, when you come to that?"

Dick frowned into the fire. This, he felt, had some hidden leading, and he wasn't going to be caught.

"What's the use of asking fool questions?" he inquired, in his turn. "You know."

"Can't help it," said Raven. "I've got to be Socratic. Help me out, old man. Let me have my little game. What is normal?"

"Why," said Dick, floundering, "I suppose it's what the general run of people think—and do. It's keeping to the rules. It's trotting on the course. It isn't going off at some tangent of your own."

Dick felt rather proud of this, its fluency and general appositeness. He plucked up his spirits, thinking he might be going to manage Raven, after all.

"Now, see here," said Raven, suddenly leaning forward and looking at him in the friendliest community of feeling, "it means a good deal when a fellow of my years, as you say, gets a biff that sends him staggering."

"Just what I said," Dick assured him. "It's mighty serious. It's awful."

"Has it occurred to you," said Raven, "that I may be right?"

"Right? How right?"

Thereupon question and answer piled up fast.

"I've indicted the universe, as it were. How can you prove the universe hasn't laid herself open to it? How do you know the indictment of the creature she made and then ground under her heel isn't the very thing she's been waiting for all these millions of years?"

"Oh, come, Jack! the universe hasn't been waiting for you. That's a part of it, don't you see? You've got delusions, delusions of greatness, delusions——"

"Shut up. Don't use your spurious jargon on me. Just answer my questions. How do you know it isn't the healthiest thing that ever happened in this rotten tissue of pretense we call civilization for even one man—just one—to get up and swear at the whole system and swear again that, so far as his little midge's existence goes, he won't subscribe to it? What business have you to call that disease? How do you know it isn't health? How do you know I'm not one of the few normal atoms in the whole blamed carcass?"

Dick felt himself profoundly shocked. He was having to reverse his conclusions. Uncle Jack had stood for a well ordered sanity, conversant with wool and books and

mysteriously devoted to Miss Anne Hamilton, whose conventional perfections evidently held within their limit Uncle Jack's highest ideals. Uncle Jack had shown a neat talent with his pen. He had grown middle-aged at an imperceptible and blameless pace, and now he was raging about like a sort of cave man with nothing less than the universe to bound his wild leaps and curvetings.

"But you know, Jack," he remonstrated feebly, "there isn't anything new in saying the nation's going to the dogs. The Britishers say it, we say it——"

"I don't say it," Raven asserted. "We're not going to the dogs. We've gone. We're there. We're the dogs ourselves, and nothing worse could happen to a criminal —from Mars, for example—than to be sent to us. We ought to be the convict colony of the universe."

"Don't," said Dick, with an affectionate sweetness as exasperating as it was moving. "It only excites you. Come on out and have a tramp. We could motor out to——"

"O Lord!" groaned Raven. "Why don't you beguile me up to the Psychopathic?"

Then he was, for the first time, aghast at what he had set going. Dick was looking at him again with that suffused glance of an affection too great to mind disclosing itself in all its pathetic abnegation.

"I couldn't say it myself," he began brokenly. "But you've said it; you see yourself. If you would——"

There he stopped and Raven sat staring at him. He felt as if the words had got inside his body and were somehow draining his heart. When he spoke, his voice sounded hoarse in his own ears.

"Dick, old man," he said, "I'm not—that."

"No! no!" Dick hastened to assure him, and somehow his hand had found Raven's and gripped it. "Only—O

good God!" he ended, and got out of his chair and turned his back.

Raven, too, rose.

"Dick," said he quietly, "you go home now. And don't you speak about this to anybody, not to Nan even. You understand."

Dick nodded, still with his back turned, and got out of the room, and Raven thought he must have caught at his hat in the hall, and made one stride for the door. The door banged and Raven was alone.

VI

The next day Nan telephoned Raven that she was taking train for New York for perhaps a week's stay with the Seaburys. These were her nearest relatives, cousins at a remove Raven never really untangled, and of late they had been spending persuasive energy in trying to induce her to live with them. Since she had come home from France and Aunt Anne had died, they were always descending upon her for brief visits in the house where she succeeded Aunt Anne, and liking her so tumultuously, in her grown-up state, that they pelted her with arguments based on her presumable loneliness there and the silliness of carrying on the establishment really as a species of home for superannuated servants. Nan honestly liked the cousins, in a casual way, though it was as inconceivable to her that the Boston house might be given up as it would have been to Aunt Anne. There was, she felt, again in Aunt Anne's way, a certain continuity of things you didn't even think of breaking. Now she was seeking the Seaburys for reasons of her own. They had to be suitably told that Aunt Anne had left her money away from them as from her, and naturally, though ridiculously, to "that Raven she was always making a fool of herself about." They were ruthless of speech within family conclave, though any one of them would have thought more than twice about calling Aunt Anne any sort of fool, in her lifetime, even at a distance safely beyond hear-

ing. Raven was not, if Nan could forestall the possibility, to be assaulted by mounting waves of family animosity.

Raven was glad, for once, to get rid of her, to find she was removing herself from the domestic turmoil he had created. There could not be the triangular discussions inevitable if she and Dick fell upon him at once, nor should he have to bear the warmth of her tumultous sympathy. Dick had evidently told her nothing, and he even gathered that she was going without notice to Dick. Then Raven began a systematic and rapid onslaught on his immediate affairs, to put them in order. Mr. Whitney, Anne's lawyer, who had always seemed to regard him in a disconcerting way as belonging to Anne, or her belonging in some undefined fashion to him, opened out expansively on the provisions of the will. He most sincerely congratulated Raven. Of course it was to have been expected, but——! Raven kept miserably to the proprieties of the moment. He listened with all due reserve, silent on the subject of Anne's letter. That was his affair, he thought, his and Nan's; unless, indeed, it was nobody's affair but Anne Hamilton's, and he was blindly to constitute himself the unreasoning agent of her trust. That must be thought out later. If he undertook it now, piling it on the pack of unsubstantial miseries he was carrying, he would be swamped utterly. He could only drop it into a dark pocket of his mind where an ill-assorted medley of dreads and fear lay waiting—for what? For a future less confusing than this inscrutable present? At least, they could not be even glanced at now. He wrote Charlotte and Jerry, his caretakers on the place at Wake Hill, that he was coming for an indefinite stay. He instructed his housekeeper in Boston that the house was to be kept open; possibly Mr. Richard would be there a good deal.

Then he sat down to write his sister. That was the problem: what should he say to her who would presently be receiving his unfortunate screed with some inflammatory introduction from Dick and would—he knew her!—scarcely have finished it before she took steps toward flooding him with epistolary advice and comment. He could see her now at her desk, assembling data of conduct, bodily well-being, and putting it all down in that masterful hand of hers. That settled it. He mustn't write her. He must telegraph and forestall Dick. And he did telegraph her, on the moment, a message of noncommittal brevity:

"Letter Dick sent you is all poppycock. Forget it."

That might, he concluded, yet without hope, keep her from rushing her pen to the rescue, even if it did not prevent her fuming. And as he sat at the library table with a disorder of papers before him, Dick appeared at the door: good boy, full of zeal and pity. He looked so overflowing with honest affection, so eagerly ready to help that Raven exasperatedly loved him for his kind officiousness. Yet he had nothing for him but a gruff:

"Now what do you think you're here for?"

Dick was prepared for repulse, this or any other. He had armed himself against all possible whims and obstinacies, and he wore the air of a carefully adjusted patience.

"Can't I help there?" he inquired, advancing to the table and drawing up a chair. "Couldn't you let me run over those and just tell you what they are?"

"You go to thunder," said Raven, rapidly assorting, clapping into bundles and casting aside. "Yes, you can, too. Take this basket and empty it into the fireplace. Behind the log and smash it down so it won't set the chimney afire. Remember how your grandmother used to keep

a scare going all the time for fear of chimneys? I guess I've inherited it. I have to use the formula."

Dick emptied the papers with a grave care foreign to him, as if even so small a service, at such a moment, bore a weightier meaning, and brought the basket back. He sat down and waited in a silence Raven felt more portentously vocal than the loudest outcry.

"Dick!" he said. He stopped work and looked at the youth, an unwilling smile twisting his mouth. He was not sure of its being well to take it humorously; yet it was funny. "Dick, if you've got anything to say, say it. If you haven't, clear out. This is my busy day."

Dick shook his head despairingly and yet obstinately. He wasn't going to leave Uncle Jack to the powers of darkness.

"Just tell me what you're winding things up for?" he ventured. "I ought to know."

"Then don't ask as if you were whispering into the ear of Buddha, or trying not to wake baby," said Raven, tearing a package of letters with a sudden savage haste. They were Anne's letters to him when he was in France, and he had meant to keep them because she would have an ideal of the sacredness they ought to bear, and exasperatingly the suggestion seemed to include a power of imposing itself on him. And if Dick hadn't come in to bait him with irrelevant questions, his perverse inner self excused itself, he might not be defying the ideal and tearing the letters up. As it was, he found them a salutary sacrifice.

"If you mean my going to Wake Hill, yes, I'm going. I've written Charlotte. Or rather I've addressed it to Jerry, she's so careful about his prerogative as a male."

"When?" asked Dick.

"The minute I get some boots and things to go logging

in. This house will be open. You can come in and roost if you want to. If you marry Nan"—this was an audacity that occurred to him at the moment. It suddenly seemed to him a blessed comfort to think of Nan in his house— "you can come here and live."

Dick lost his sacrificial air and turned sulky.

"I don't know about Nan," he said. "I never know about her, not since we've come back. She was soft as —as silk over there."

"The maternal," said Raven briefly, tearing one of Anne's letters, with a crack, across the pages. "It was what you needed to keep you going. Not personal, only because you were a sojer boy."

The mortification of it all, the despite of not holding his own with her now he was not serving a cause, was plainly evident in Dick's face. He had had a bad night of it, after Nan's flouting and Uncle Jack's letter on top of that.

"She was beastly," he said, with no further elaboration.

But Raven knew he was returning to his walk home with her and some disconcerting circumstances of it. No doubt Nan had been ruthless. Her mind had been on Aunt Anne and the Palace of Peace. Little boys in love couldn't joggle her fighting arm and expect to escape irritated reproof.

"Nan's got a good deal to think of just now," he said. "Besides, you may not be man enough for her yet. Nan's very much of a woman. She'll expect things."

Dick sat glowering.

"I'm as much of a man as I was in France," he said obstinately. "More. I'm older." Then his sacrificial manner came back, and, remembering what he was there for, he resumed, all humble sweetness, like the little Dick

who used to climb on Raven's knee and ask for a tell-story: "I'm going down with you. I've made all my plans."

Raven looked up at him in a new surprise.

"The deuce you are," said he. "No, you're not, boy. If I catch you down there I'll play the game as you've mapped it out for me. I'll grab Jerry's axe or pitchfork and run amuck, blest if I don't. You'll wake up and find yourself sending for the doctor."

Glancing cheerfully up, he was instantly aware, from the boy's unhappy face, that Dick believed him. Raven burst into a laugh, but he quickly sobered. What a snare they were getting themselves into, and only by an impish destiny of haphazard speech.

"Don't look so shocked, Dickie," he said flippantly. "I'm no more dotty than—Hamlet."

There he stopped again to wonder whimsically at the ill fate of it all. For Hamlet was mad; at least, Dick thought so. He couldn't have caught at anything more injurious to his cause.

" 'They fool me to the top of my bent,' " he reflected ruefully.

That was what Dick was ready to do. But sister Amelia wouldn't fool him, if she got East with her emergency dressing bag and her perfectly equipped energy. She would clap him into the Psychopathic before he had time for even half as much blank verse as Hamlet had. They wouldn't allow him a first act.

"Don't look like that," he suggested again and kindly, because it was evident that, however irritating Dick might be as a prospective guardian, he was actually suffering an honest misery.

"I don't," said Dick. "I mean, I don't mean to look different. But somehow it's got me, this whole business

has, and I can't get away from it. I've thought of it every minute since you told me. It isn't so much you I'm thinking about. It's him."

Raven, as a writer of English, paused to make a mental note that, in cases of extreme emotion, the nominative case, after the verb to be, is practically no good. You simply have to scrap it.

"Who?" he inquired, in the same line of natural language.

"Old Crow."

Dick uttered the name in a low and hesitating tone. He seemed to offer it unwillingly. Raven stared at him in a perfect surprise, now uncolored by any expectation he might have had of what was coming.

"Old Crow?" he repeated. "What do you know about Old Crow?"

"Well," said Dick, defensively, "I know as much as you do. That is, I suppose I do. I know as much as all Wake Hill does, anyway."

"Who told you?"

"Mother. I didn't suppose it was any secret."

"No," said Raven thoughtfully, "it's no secret. Only he was queer, he was eccentric, and so I've always assumed he had a pretty bad time of it. That's why I never've talked about him."

"Mother did," said Dick, in a sudden expansion. It seemed to ease him up a little, this leading Raven to the source of his own apprehension. Indeed, he had felt, since Raven's letter, that they must approach the matter of his tired wits with clearness, from the scientific standpoint. The more mental facts and theories they recognized the better. "She told me once you looked just like him, that old daguerreotype."

"Had sister Amelia concluded from that," inquired

Raven quietly, "that I was bound to follow Old Crow, live in the woods and go missionarying across the mountain?"

"No," said Dick, so absorbed in his line of argument that he was innocently unaware of any intended irony. "She just happened to speak of it one day when we found the daguerreotype. Uncle Jack, just what do you know about him?"

Raven considered a moment. He was scanning his memory for old impressions and also, in his mild surprise over the pertinency of reviving them, wondering whether he had better pass them on. Or would they knot another tangle in the snarl he and Dick seemed to be, almost without their volition, making?

"Old Crow," he began slowly, "was my great-uncle. His name was John Raven. He was poor, like all the rest of us of that generation and the next, and did the usual things to advance himself, the things in successful men's biographies. He studied by the kitchen fire, not by pine knots, I fancy—that probably was the formula of a time just earlier. Anyhow he fitted himself for the college of the day, for some reason never went, but did go into a lawyer's office instead, was said to have trotted round after a gypsy sort of girl the other side of the mountain, found she was no good, went up into the woods and built the old hut I got into shape in the spring of 1914. Queer! I expected to go up there to study and write. I'd got to the point, I s'pose, where I thought if I had a different place to write in I could write better. Sure sign of waning powers! Well, he lived there by himself, and folks thought he was queer and began to call him Old Crow. I saw him several times when I was a little chap, never alone. Father took me with him when he went up to the hut to carry food. Mother never

approved of my going. She disapproved of it so much that father stopped taking me."

"Well, you saw him," said Dick, in a way of holding him to his narrative, so that Raven, wondering why it was of such importance, bent a frowning look on him.

"Yes, I saw him. And he was nice to me, uncommon nice. He put his hand on my shoulder and looked down at me in a way—well, not the patronizing, grown-up way, but as if, now I come to think of it, as if he pitied me."

"How did he look?"

Dick was catching at things, Raven saw, the slightest clue to Old Crow's withdrawn personality. He seemed, on his side, to be constructing a portrait. Raven sought about in the closed chambers of his mind and produced one significant bit of remembrance after another. They were retrieved with difficulty out of the disorder of things regarded as of no importance; but here they were.

"He was tall, thin, rather hatchet-faced, something as I am. Oh, you knew that, didn't you? No beard, and I think he was the neatest person I ever saw. Father was clean shaven, you remember; but there were days when he either got lazy or was too busy to shave. I remember how exquisitely nice and peeled his face used to look on Sunday. But Old Crow was shaved all the time, judging from the way he looked the few times I saw him. I've heard father and mother speak of it, too. Charlotte told me once she'd seen him and he was neat as a new pin."

"How old was he when he went up there into the woods?"

"To live alone? I don't know. Forty, maybe. Comparatively young, anyway."

"Was it the woman? Was there a cause for it, a cause people knew?"

"There wasn't any cause I knew. He simply, so far as

I ever heard, passed the place over to father—that was his nephew, you know—and went up the hill and built himself a log hut. It was well built. I only had to calk it some more and put in another flooring when I came into it."

As Raven went on, he became uncomfortably aware of the resemblance between his own proposed withdrawal and Old Crow's; but he stuck to it doggedly. It was all playing into Dick's hands and Amelia's, assuming he could predicate her mind; but he was resolved they shouldn't have it all their own way. He would give them every last straw of evidence, and it should do them no good in the end. There was a bravado about it. If Dick, in his affectionate virtue and Amelia in her energy of well-doing, wanted to challenge him to the proof, he'd give them a pretty tussle for it.

"What I want to know is," said Dick, "what he thought he was going off there for? Didn't anybody know?"

"They may have," said Raven. "I didn't know."

"And he lived his life out there, till he died?"

"Yes. And died in a very gentlemanly fashion, of pneumonia, and was found in a dignified position on his bed, hands folded, and everything in a great state of order, as if he'd known he was going and arranged things to give as little trouble as he could."

"What did he do up there all by himself? Read? Write?"

"He read a good deal, I believe. We found him reading when we went up."

"What sort of books?"

"Oh, hang it, Dick," said Raven, beginning to fidget under examination, "you're district-attorneying it a trifle too much to interest me. I'm getting bored, son. This isn't a third degree."

But Dick was not to be curbed or reasoned with.

"I think," he said, "if you don't mind, we'd better talk it out. You see I do really need to know about him, and you're the only one that can tell me. Mother's is chiefly hearsay."

"Fire away," said Raven easily, accepting the situation. He leaned back in his chair and began making patterns on the block of paper before him with a silver dagger at his hand. "What is it you want to know?"

"Everything. How the neighbors regarded him, what they said."

"The neighbors didn't regard him at all, in your sense. Don't you know the way country folks have of passing over the most eccentric things as if they're all in the day's work? They gossip like thunder, and, if they can whip up a scandal, they're made. But they never seem so awfully shocked. Perhaps it's because they're used to the plain facts of life, death, birth, madness, suicide. Maybe there's a sort of *gaucherie* about it. There are things you're shocked about that you wouldn't dare discuss at Cambridge or the Club. You'd be afraid it wasn't good form. Maybe you would though, now. Sometimes I forget the world's moved on a peg."

"But what did they say?"

"Can't tell you, Dick. I belong to the family, you know, and maybe they had some decency about talking over Old Crow when I was round. I don't think there was anything they could say. He was a perfectly clean, decent citizen. He kept on voting. He didn't meddle with them and they didn't with him. The only eccentricity about him was that he lived alone and that, the last ten years or so of his life, he tramped all round that region, over the mountain, too, taking care of the sick, if there were any. The last five years he went round preach-

ing, and the very last year of all he took old Billy Jones into his hut, an awful old rip, if ever there was one, and tended him till his death—Billy's death, I mean. And if you consider that as indicating queerness—except that people don't do it—I don't. I should call any conventional disapproval of it an indictment rather, an indictment of Christianity. If it's too eccentric to fit into a so-called Christian civilization, that is."

Dick wasn't going to call it anything at the moment. He sat staring at the table, evidently reflecting, digesting and bowed down by his own gravity in a way that always amused Raven even when he loved the boy most. He fancied, when Dick looked like that, he was brooding over his nose.

"Take it easy, son," he advised him pleasantly. "You won't get anywhere with Old Crow. Guess again."

"No," said Dick, oblivious of the flippancy of this, "we sha'n't get anywhere. We haven't enough data."

"Now," said Raven, coming up from his lounging posture, "I've got to hustle. You run along and we'll go out somewhere to-night: dine, if you want to, and drop in at a show. But, for heaven's sake, don't go to digging up graveyards and expecting me to reconstruct your ancestors from as few bones as we've got of Old Crow's. You bore me sometimes, horribly, Dick. And that's the truth."

Dick did go away, though with an inarticulate remonstrance on his tongue. But Raven was good-natured and yet decided, and even went to the door with him, propelling him by a firm yet affectionate hand on his shoulder.

They did dine out that night in a manner mildly bohemian, really determined upon by Raven to show Dick he wasn't incapable yet of the accepted forms of diversion, afflictingly dull though they might prove.

VII

In less than a week Raven, hurried beyond any design of his own by Dick's anxious attentions, had actually gone. Once in the train on the way into the uplands where Wake Hill lies, he reflected, with a smile, that Dick had really helped him inconceivably in this matter of haste. He might have loitered along, dallying with the wisdom of going, and possibly ended by not going at all. But Dick's insistence on formulating the situation, his neatness and energy in getting all the emotions of the case into their proper pigeon holes, had so harassed and then bored him that he had worked like a beaver, he told himself, to get off and escape them altogether. And not a word from Amelia, either to his telegram or Dick's letter. Things were looking up. It might be Amelia had been elected to some new and absorbing organization for putting the social edifice still more irretrievably into the disorder it seemed bent for, in which case she might forget the inner wobblings of such an inconspicuous nomad as a brother in metaphysical pangs. He became recklessly optimistic, as the train climbed higher into the hills, and luxuriated in it, conscious all the time that it was altitude that was intoxicating him, not any real hope of hoodwinking Amelia. You couldn't do that so easily.

The first glimpse of a far-away mountain brought the surprising tears to his eyes. It was an inconsiderable ridge with an outline of no distinction, but it had the old

charm, the power of clutching at his heart and dragging it up from the glories and sorrows of the sea. Raven always insisted that he loved the sea best, with its terrors and multitudinous activities; but the mountains did pull him up somewhere into a region he did not inhabit all the time. He had an idea that this was simply a plane of physical exhilaration; but it didn't matter. It was an easement of a sort, if only the difference of change. When he stepped out of the train at Wake Hill he was in a tranquil frame of mind, and the more the minute he saw Jerry Slate there in the pung, enveloped in the buffalo coat he had worn through the winter months ever since he attained his present height. Jerry was a typical man of Wake Hill. He was ten years, at least, older than Raven and had lived here, man and boy, all his life, and his wife, Charlotte, was the presiding benevolence of the Raven home. Seeing his passenger, he lifted his whip-stock in salute and stepped out of the pung to meet him. Jerry was yellow and freckled and blue-eyed, with a face, Raven always thought, like a baked apple. It had still a rosy bloom, but the puckers overspread it, precisely like an apple's after fervent heat. They shook hands, Jerry having extracted a gnarled member from his mitten.

"You take a look an' see 'f your trunk's come," he recommended, restoring his hand to its beautifully knit sheath. "You're better acquainted with the looks on't than I be. There 'tis now. Anyways it's the only one there."

It was Raven's own, and he and Jerry lifted it into the back of the pung, and were presently jogging temperately homeward. Jerry never had horses with any go in them. In the old days, when Raven used to come to the farm with his mother, he would write Jerry to see that he had a horse.

"Get me a horse," he would write, "a horse, a horse, with four feet and a mane and tail. Not a wooden freak out of Noah's ark, whittled out with a jack-knife, such as I had last year. Get me a horse."

And he would arrive to find some aged specimen, raw-boned and indifferent, waiting for him in the stable. And Jerry would slap the creature's haunches with a fictitious jollity and prophesy, the while he kept an anxious eye on Raven, "I guess he'll suit ye all right."

He never did suit. He had to be swapped off or, as it happened once or twice, given away, and yet Raven was obtuse to the real reason until Charlotte enlightened him. She took him aside, one day in the autumn, when he and his mother were going back to town.

"I guess if you want any horses next spring," she said, with one eye on the door where Jerry might appear, "you better fetch 'em along with you."

"Why, yes," said Raven, "of course I can. Only I had an idea Jerry liked to do the buying for the place."

"Not horses," said Charlotte firmly. "Jerry's a peculiar sort of man. They know it an' they kinder take advantage of him. I dunno why."

Then Raven realized that Charlotte herself was responsible for his faith in Jerry's bargaining prowess. She had hypnotized him into considering Jerry a great fellow at a trade as at everything else manly and invincible. She was watching him now with a doubtful and anxious eye.

"No," she repeated, "I dunno why."

"No," said Raven, "I don't know why either. But I'll look out for it." At that instant he understood her way with Jerry and loved her for it. She was tall and heavy-browed and dark, with warm, brown tints of eyes and skin, and seven times the man Jerry was, but it was her

passionate intent to hold him supreme at home and market.

Meantime they were jingling along, with a chill clashing of bells, and Raven had heard all about the prospects of an open winter and the difficulties of ice-cutting, and he gathered that Jerry and Charlotte were extremely pleased to have him come.

"Didn't know's we should ever set eyes on ye ag'in," said Jerry, with an innocuous flick of his whiplash, hitting the dasher by intent. "That War an' all."

Raven thought he detected in his tone a general hostility to the War as a disturber even of Wake Hill, and wondered if he should have to fight it all over again with the imperfectly satisfied ideals of Jerry and Charlotte. But Jerry laid that bogey to rest.

"Not that I wouldn't ha' had ye go," he announced. "I'd ha' gone myself if I hadn't been a leetle mite over age. I dunno but I could ha' been some use as 'twas. I'm spry for my years. I never so much as thought you'd git into it. Charlotte an' I were talkin' it over last night, an' she says, 'He's forty-three, if he's a day.' How old be you?"

"Forty-five," said Raven. "I wasn't in the trenches, you know. Ambulance Corps."

"Sho!" said Jerry. "Never come nigh the fightin' line, I s'pose."

"Sometimes," said Raven, smiling a little to himself. "But the boys in the trenches, you know, they're the ones that did the business. I suppose the Hamilton house was closed all summer?"

Jerry gave him a quick look and then took off a mitten to pass his hand across his mouth. Raven knew what the look meant. It meant Anne Hamilton: how had her death affected him? would he ask about her? and the mild inquis-

itive neighborhood mind would go back to the old question it had probably dropped and taken up intermittently for years: why, in their curious intimacy, had he never married her?

"Yes," said Jerry, "all summer. Little Nan was over there, too, where you were, I understood."

"Yes, she was over there. She's home now."

"You knew her aunt died?" said Jerry speciously. It was foolish, he knew it was foolish, and yet he could not, in his craving for some amplification of the fact, help saying it.

"Yes," said Raven, "I knew it."

There the topic died. They were passing the last stretch of woods that fringed the road before Raven's own house. Up on that slope at the right, draped about by a dense woodland, occasional patches of pines girdled by birch and maple, was the hut where Old Crow had lived. A logging road came down from the ridge, and Raven saw with interest that it had been broken out.

"Chopping?" he asked, Jerry following his glance to the ascending road.

Jerry grinned and clucked to the horse. He looked well satisfied with himself.

"No," he said. "But the minute you wrote you was comin', I yoked up the oxen an' broke her out. Charlotte said you'd want to be goin' up there."

Raven laughed. It was funny, too grimly funny. Even Charlotte and Jerry were pushing him on up the rise to Old Crow's hut. Dick had begun it and they were adding the impulse of their kindly forethought.

"Yes," he said, "I shall. I'll go up at once." ("And have it over!" his mind cynically added.)

They were descending the last slope and the mild-mannered horse caught the idea of stables and put on a gait.

Raven could see the house, delightful to him in its hospitable amplitude and starkly fitting the wintry landscape. There in the columned front porch running away at each side into wide verandas, stood a woman, tall, of proportions that looked, at this first glance, heroic. She wore a shawl about her shoulders, but her head was bare.

"There she is," said Jerry, with an evident pride in so splendid a fact. "I tell her she never can wait a minute to let anybody turn round."

It was true. Charlotte could not wait. She began to wave—no short, staccato, pump-handle wave, but a sweep indicative of breadth, like the horizon line. Raven, while they were jingling up to the house, took one more look at it, recognizing, with a surprise that was almost poignant, how much it meant to him. He might not be glad to get back to it—in his present state of disaffection he could not believe there was a spot on earth he should be glad to see—but it touched the chord of old memories and his eyes were hot with the assault of it. A square house with many additions, so that it rambled comfortably away, threaded over at advantageous points by leafless lines of woodbine and bitter-sweet and murmured over by a great grove of pines at the west: his roots of life were here, he recognized, with a renewed pang of surprise. He was not used to thinking about himself. Now that the changed bias of his mind had bred new habits, he was thinking a great deal.

They stopped at the porch and Charlotte came down to them, stepping lightly yet with deliberation. Raven knew she probably moved slowly because she was so heavy, but it gave the effect of majesty walking. She was unchanged, he thought, as he grasped her firm hand: her smooth brown hair was as thick, her healthy face unlined.

When he touched Charlotte he always felt as if he touched the earth itself. Her hand was the hand of earth, ready to lead you to wholesome and satisfying things.

"Well," said she, "if I ain't pleased to see you! Jerry, you goin' to take the trunk in this way?"

Jerry gave her a quick look of inquiry. They had subtle modes of communication. Charlotte could command him by the flicker of an eyelash or a modulation of tone, so that Jerry seemed, in the resultant act, to be following only his own careless or deliberate will.

"Yep," said he, "I'll see to her."

Raven laid hold of it with him and they carried it upstairs to the great front room looking out to the eastern sky. And Raven was again moved, as he went, by another surprising discovery: Charlotte had tears in her eyes. He had at all times a moderate estimate of his own value in the world, his own appeal to it. Perhaps that was one reason, aside from the natural sex revulsion, why Anne's exaggerated fostering had roused in him that wearied perversity. But it was warming to see Charlotte glad enough to cry over him. When they had set down the trunk and the two had gone downstairs, he looked about the room and found it good. The walls were chiefly paneling, all but some expanses of a rich rose and blue paper; the hangings were of a delicious blue, and a roaring fire was making great headway. He could guess Charlotte had timed that birch log, relative to their approach, for the curling bark had not yet blackened and the fat chuckle of it was still insistent. He laughed a little at himself. He might have repudiated the scheme of creation and his own place in it, but he did love things: dear, homespun, familiar things, potent to eke out man's well-being with their own benevolence and make him temporarily content in an inhospitable world.

When he went downstairs, the smells from the kitchen were something overwhelming in their rich pervasiveness. He went directly in where Charlotte bent at the oven door for a frowning inspection and a resultant basting.

"Yes," she said, glancing up, "turkey. Jerry set him aside, sort of—he was so well formed and had such nice, pretty ways. Jerry said we'd have him first time you come. He's always be'n a terrible nice turkey."

Raven had seen his place laid in the dining-room with bravery of damask and old china.

"I'm not going to eat alone," he said. "I couldn't face a whole turkey. You and Jerry come on in and back me up. You set on two more plates."

"Oh, no," said Charlotte, closing the oven door and rising. "I guess I'll give him a minute longer. No. It's real nice of you, but we couldn't. Jerry never would in the world."

"Jerry be hanged!" said Raven. He wandered into the pantry and began helping himself to the celery waiting by the cool window-pane. "Tell him it's all decided. Jerry's got to do what we say."

"If that ain't just like you," said Charlotte, with what seemed a pride in his knowing ways. "Eatin' up the celery an' all, the minute 'fore dinner, too. I wonder you don't pry into the cooky jar."

"I will, now you mention it," said Raven, bending to it where it lurked, with its secretive look, under the lower shelf. He lifted the cover with an involuntary care. He had been there so often when he wanted a handful of cookies and knew, if he clinked the cover, he might hear his father's voice from the dining-room where he sat reading his paper: "What are you doing out there?" The cookies were waiting for him, unchanged, as if there were an everlasting pattern of cookies and you couldn't get

away from it: oak-leaf, discreetly specked with caraway. "Hurry up," said he, coming out to Charlotte with his clutch of oak-leaves. "Put on your plate and Jerry's or the turkey'll be done before you know it."

Charlotte glanced round at him, absently took the cookies from his hand, as if he were a child whose greed must be regulated, and laid them in a plate on the table.

"Don't you spoil your appetite," she said, still absently, for her mind was with the turkey. Well, I'll go an' ask Jerry. I don't believe he'll feel to. Miss Anne——"

Raven was sure he heard the last two words as she made her light way out into the shed in a fictitious search for Jerry. He stood staring after her and wondering. It was inconceivable that Anne, by sheer force of a mind absolutely convinced of its own rightness, should have had such a grip on everybody she came in contact with. It had been Anne's house next door. She had spent her summers in it, and even Charlotte had imbibed through its walls the pronouncements of a social code. Anne was dead, but when Charlotte and Jerry were asked to sit down to turkey with their employer and familiar friend, it was Anne's unforgotten ideal that rose before her, the illuminated copy of the social code in its rigid hand. As he stood, he saw Jerry pulling the pung under a shed at the back of the barn. He knew Charlotte hadn't seen him, didn't intend to take the time to see him, but would presently be back with Jerry's ultimatum. That was her system. She implicitly followed Jerry's command, a command she had already put into his mouth. It was so accepted a part of the household routine that he had ceased to think of it as in the least unusual. She was back again almost at once.

"Jerry says he'd be happy to, to-day," she announced,

"so long's as he ain't changed back into his barn clo'es. We'll be kinder company. But after this, he says, we'll begin as usual."

So presently they sat down together to the crackly brown turkey and Raven carved and fought off Charlotte, who rose from her place in a majestic authority which seemed the highest decorum to take the fork and pick out titbits for his plate, and they talked of countryside affairs, but never, Raven was grateful to notice, of his absence or of France. Once Jerry did begin a question relative to "them long range guns," but Charlotte bore him down before Raven could lay hold of the question, even if he had been eager for it.

"Jerry's forbid me to ask you the leastest thing about how 'twas over there," she said smoothly, without a look at Jerry, but a direct intention that was like a swift secret communication between them, a line not even to be tapped. "He says, 'We won't say one word about what Mr. Raven's been through, not if he begins to talk about it himself. He's been through enough,' says he. 'Now le's let him turn his mind to suthin' else.' "

"Yes," said Jerry boldly, "I guess that's pretty nigh what I said—what I'd say now, anyways."

Raven smiled a little inwardly, as he often did at "Mr. Raven." He and Jerry and Charlotte had been neighbors, and he, being younger, was always "young John" to them, and sometimes, in excess of friendliness or exhortation, "Jack." He wondered if it had been the social idealism of Anne that had made them attain the proper title, or if, when the crust of renewed convention broke through, they would, under the stress of common activities, flounder about as they did before he went away, in an intermittent familiarity.

"All the houses shut up," he said, "the summer houses?"

"Yes," said Charlotte, eating her wing delicately, perhaps with a thought of Anne. "City folks all gone. Went early this year, too. Wood's so high now, if they ain't cut their own they don't seem to want to lay in. Jerry says they'd ought to think further ahead."

"Yes," said Jerry, with his mechanical acquiescence, "they'd ought to think further ahead."

"Who's bought the old Frye place?" asked Raven. "Or is it empty?"

"No," said Charlotte, "it ain't empty. I dunno's you remember the Tenneys that used to live over the mountain, what they call Mountain Brook. Kind of a shif'less lot they were. Some of 'em drinked."

"Why, yes," said Raven, "I remember 'em. The boys used to do a lot of trapping. One of 'em—what was his name? Israel, yes, that's it. Israel—he seemed to be of a different stripe. Used to work out. Seemed to want to make something of himself."

"That's him," said Charlotte. "Well, he's bought the Frye place."

"Married?"

"Yes, he married a girl over there, at Mountain Brook. He'd been away years an' years, sence he was a growin' boy, an' he come back, an' seems he had money laid up, an' he bought the Frye farm an' went straight off over to Mountain Brook an' hunted her up an' married her. She used to have folks, but they've all moved away. Seems if he'd had her in mind all the time. Kind o' that way, he is, lays his fires a good while beforehand."

"Nice girl?" Raven inquired.

Charlotte hesitated. Her brown cheek flushed.

"Well," she said, "I never've heard anything ag'inst her, not anything I should be willin' to repeat. You know what they be, there over the mountain. There's the

Donnyhills. Good folks, but shif'less! my soul! Though she ain't that."

"Called on her, haven't you?"

"No," said Charlotte. She wore the flush of resentful matronhood. "I was goin' to. I started, one afternoon. An' after I'd knocked, I heard him jawin'. Well! You never heard a man talk so in all your life. I never did, anyways! twittin' her with everything under the sun."

"Nice for you," said Raven, "butting in on a row."

"I didn't butt in," said Charlotte. "I turned round an' come straight home. An' the next day they rode by, as budge as you please, she with the baby in her lap. Baby had on a nice white coat. I didn't go ag'in. I didn't feel to."

Then Raven, seeing that Jerry had regretfully but inevitably laid down his knife and fork, as one who can no more, relinquished the Tenneys, and there was a period of that silence so blessed among intimates, and Charlotte brought in the pudding. And after dinner, while she washed the dishes, Raven sat in the kitchen and smoked a pipe with Jerry and thought intermittently, in the inmost cell of his most secret mind, about the blessed beauties of things. Here they were all about him, inherited treasures of memory, some of them homely and of little value, many of them far less convenient than the appliances of the present day. He even thought he recognized ancient utensils, as Charlotte washed them, the great iron spider where crullers were fried—always with a few cut in hands with straight fat fingers, to suit a boyish fancy—and the colander he had once been found utilizing as a helmet in a play of chivalry. Such smells came out of this kitchen, like no other smells in any house he knew. The outlines of things, the tints of time and use! There was the red door into the buttery, where once, when he

was a little boy, he had caught for a few minutes only an enchanting glow from the setting sun. Sunrise and rubies and roses: none of them had ever equaled the western light on the old red paint. Over and over again he had tried to recall the magic, to set the door at the precise angle to catch the level rays, but in vain. It was a moment of beauty, fleeting as the sunset itself, and only to be found in the one permanence that is memory. He remembered it now with a thousand other impressions as lasting and as lost, and childhood and youth came alive in him and hurt and helped him. Yes, this was home. In a hostile universe there was one spot where he and the past could safely rest.

VIII

Raven went to sleep thinking simply about the house, while the fire flickered down on the hearth and shadows all about the room flickered with it and then went out. He always loved shadows, their beauties and grotesqueries, and he was unfeignedly glad he had no scientific understanding of them, why they played this way or that and translated the substance that made them so delicately and sometimes with such an adorable foolishness. He liked it better that way, liked to make out of them a game of surprises and pretend they were in good form and doing particularly well, or again far below their highest. And following his childishly enchanting game he began to feel rather abashed over what had brought him here. He was glad to have come. It was the only place for him, disordered as he was, with its wholesome calm, and he wondered further if the state of mind that had become habitual to him was now a state of mind at all. Was it not rather a temporary drop in mental temperature now calming to normal? Hadn't he exaggerated the complication of Anne's bequest? There was a way out of it; there must be, a sane, practical way to satisfy what she wished and what she might be supposed to wish now. He comforted himself with the pious sophistry of an Anne raised on the wind of death above early inconclusions and so, of course, agreeing with him who didn't have to pass the gates of mystery to be so raised. He knew enough, evidently, so that he didn't need to die to know more. His

letter to Dick seemed of inconsiderable importance, even the disaster of its reaching Amelia. If she held him up to it, he could laugh it off. Anything could be laughed off. So, the shadows mingling with the inconsequence of his thoughts, he drifted away to sleep, catching himself back, now and then, to luxuriate in the assurance that he was in the right place, finding comfortable assuagements, and that inexplicably, because so suddenly, everything was for the best in a mysterious but probably entirely unaccountable world.

At four o'clock he woke. He had not for a moment last night expected this. Four o'clock had been for months the hour of his tryst with the powers of darkness. They hovered over him then with dull grey wings extended, from sunrise to sunset, from east to west. He never had the courage to peer up at them and see how far the wings really did reach. They covered his mortal sky, and when he refused to stare up into their leaden pinions, they stooped to him and buffeted and smothered him, until he was such a mass of bruised suffering within that he could almost believe his body also was quivering into the numbness of acquiescent misery. And here were the wings again. They were even lower, in spite of this clear air. They did not merely shut it out from his nostrils, but the filthy pinions swept his face and roused in him the uttermost revulsion of mortal man against the accident of his mortality. The trouble of earth passed before him in its unceasing panorama, a pageant of pain and death. Every atom of creation was against every other atom, because everywhere was warfare, murder and rapine, for the mere chance of living. He had won his inherited chance by sheer luck of contest through millions of years while his forebears came up from the slime and the cave. The little hunted creature, shrieking out there in the wood in the

clutch of a predatory enemy was not so lucky. It was the enemy who was lucky to-night, but to-morrow night the enemy himself might go down under longer claws and be torn by fangs stronger than his own. And God had made it so. And God did not care.

Raven lay there panting under the horror of it. The sweat started on his skin. He was afraid. It was not his own well-being he feared for. Man's life was short at the most. A few years might finish him up. It was unlikely that he need live again. But he feared seeing still more of the acts of this unmindful God, who could make, and set the wheel of being to turning and then stand aside and let them grind out their immeasurable grist of woe. And when he asked himself how he knew God was standing aside, letting the days and years fulfil their sum, he believed it was because he had suddenly become aware that time was a boundless sea and that the human soul was sometimes in the trough of it and sometimes on the crest. But never would the sea cast its derelicts upon warm shores where they might build the house of life and live in peace and innocence. Ever would they find themselves tossed from low to high and fall from high to low again in the salt wash of the retreating wave. For after all, it was the mysterious sea God had a mind to, never the derelict atoms afloat on it. They would have to take sea weather to time's extremest verge, as they always had taken it. They were derelicts.

As the light came, the leaden wings lifted and he went down to the early breakfast Charlotte and Jerry intended to eat alone. Charlotte, with her good morning, gave him a quick glance. He found she had not expected him so early and knew she saw at once how harassed he was. He insisted on sitting down to breakfast with them and, after Jerry had gone out, went over the house in a mindless

way, into all the rooms, to give himself something to do. Also there seemed to be a propriety in it, a fittingness in presenting himself to his own walls and accepting their silent recognition. Then, hearing Charlotte upstairs, he went back into the kitchen, as straight as if he had meant to go there all the time and had merely idled on these delaying quests, and up to the nail by the shed door where the key always hung, the key to Old Crow's hut. He took it off the nail, dropped it in his pocket, got a leather jacket from the hall and went out into the road. As he went, he heard Jerry moving about in the barn and walked the faster, not to be halted or offered friendly company. At the great maples he paused, two of them marking the entrance to the wood road, and looked about him. The world was resolutely still. The snow was not deep, but none of it had melted. It was of a uniform whiteness and luster and the shadows in it were deeply blue. There were tracks frozen into it all along the road, many of them old ones, others just broken, the story of some animal's wandering. Then he turned into the wood road and began to climb the rise, and as he went he was conscious of an unaccountable excitement. Dick was responsible for that, he told himself. Dick had waked his mind to old memories. This was, in effect, and all owing to Dick, a tryst with Old Crow.

He remembered every step of the way, what he might find if he could sweep off the snow or wait until June and let the mounting sun sweep it according to its own method. Here at the right would be the great patch of clintonia. Further in at the left was tiarella, with its darling leaf, and along under the yellow birches the lady's slipper he had transplanted, year after year, and that finally took root and showed a fine sturdiness he had never seen exceeded elsewhere. He went on musing over the

permanence of things and the mutability of mortal joy, wondering if, in this world He had made without remedies for its native ills, God could take pleasure in the bleak framework of it. And when he had nearly reached the top of the slope, the three firs, where a turn to the left would bring him to the log cabin door, suddenly he stopped as if his inner self heard the command to halt. He looked about him, and his heart began to beat hard. But he was not surprised. What could be more moving than the winter stillness of the woods in a spot all memories? Yet he was in no welcoming mood for high emotion, and looking up and about, to shake off the wood magic, there at a little distance at his right, between pine boles, he saw her, the woman. She was tall and slender, yet grandly formed. A blue cloak was wrapped about her and her head was bare. Her face had a gaunt beauty such as he had never seen. The eyes, richly blue but darkened by the startled pupil, were bewildering in their soft yet steady appealingness. Her hair was parted and carried back in waves extraordinarily thick and probably knotted behind. That, of course, he could not see. But the little soft rings of it about her forehead he noted absently. And her look was so full of dramatic tension, of patient, noble gravity, even grief, that one phrase flashed into his mind, "The Mother of Sorrows!" and stayed there. So moving was her face that, although he had at the first instant taken in her entire outline, the significance of it had not struck him until now. On her arm, in the immemorial mother's fashion, she carried a child. The child was in white and a blue scarf was tied about his head. When Raven saw the scarf, his tension relaxed. There was something about the scarf that was real, was earthly: a ragged break in one free corner. In the relief of seeing the break, and being thus brought back

to tangible things, he realized that he had, in a perfect seriousness, for one amazing minute, believed the woman and the child to be not human but divine. They were, as they struck upon his eyes, a vision, and he would have been in no sense surprised to see the vision fade. It was the Virgin Mary and her Son. Now, as he realized with the lightning rapidity of a morbidly excited mind how terribly sensitive to his own needs he must be to have clutched so irrationally at a world-old remedy, he took off his hat and called to her:

"You startled me."

Without waiting for any response, he turned to the left, because the probabilities were that he had startled her also, and that was why she had stood there, petrified into the catalepsy of wood animals struck by cautionary fear. But, as he turned, a man's voice sounded through the woods, and waked an echo:

"Hullo!" it called. "Hullo!"

Raven involuntarily paused, and saw the woman running toward him. There were stumps in her way, but she stepped over them lightly, and once, when she had to cross a hollow where the snow lay deep, she sank in up to her knees, and Raven involuntarily stepped forward to help her. But she freed herself with incredible quickness and came on. It might have been water she was wading in, so little did it check her. She halted before him, only a pace away, as if she must be near in order to speak cautiously, and Raven noted the exquisite texture of her pale skin and the pathos of her eyes, the pupils distended now so that he wondered if they could be blue. Meantime the voice kept on calling, "Hullo! hullo!"

She spoke tremulously, in haste:

"He'll be up here in a minute. You say you ain't seen me."

"Is it some one you're afraid of?" Raven asked.

She nodded, in a dumb anguish.

"Then," said he, "we'll both stay here till he comes, and afterward I'll go with you, wherever you're going."

This, it seemed, moved her to a terror more acute.

"No! no!" she said, and she appeared to have so little breath to say it that, if he had not been watching her lips, he could not have caught it. "Not you. That would make him madder'n ever. You go away. Hide you somewheres, quick."

"No," said Raven, "I sha'n't hide. I'll hide you. Come along."

He took her by the arm and, though she was remonstrating breathlessly, hurried her to the left. They passed the three firs at the turn and he smiled a little, noting Jerry's good road and thinking there was some use in this combined insistence on his following the steps of Old Crow. There was the hut, in its rough kindliness, and there, the smoke told him, was a fire. Jerry had been up that morning, because Charlotte must have known he'd come there the first thing. Still smoothing the road to Old Crow! He had been fumbling with one hand for the key, the while he kept the other on her arm. She was so terrified a creature now that he did not trust her not to break blindly away and run. He unlocked the door, pushed her in, closed and locked it. Then he dropped the key in his pocket and went back to the wood road. With a sudden thought, he took his knife from his pocket and tossed it down the road into a little heap of brush. Meanwhile the man was coming nearer and, as he came, he called: "Hullo!"

Raven, waiting for him, speculated on the tone. What did it mean? It was a breathless tone, though not in any manner like the woman's. It was as if he had run and

stumbled and caught himself up, and all the time been strangled from within by rage or some like madness. The woman's breathlessness had simply meant life's going out of her with sheer fright. Now the man was coming up the slope, bent at the shoulders, as if he carried a heavy load or as if almost doubling himself helped him to go the faster. He was a thin man with long arms and he carried an axe. Raven called to him:

"Hullo, there! Take a look as you come along and see if you can find my knife."

The man stopped short, straightened, and looked at him. Meantime Raven, bending in his search, went toward him, scrutinizing the road from side to side. He had a good idea of the fellow in the one glance he gave him: a pale, thin face, black eyes with a strange spark in them, a burning glance like the inventor's or the fanatic's, and black hair. It was an ascetic face, and yet there was passion of an unnamed sort ready to flash out and do strange things, overthrow the fabric of an ordered life perhaps, or contradict the restraint of years. He stood motionless until Raven, still searching, had got within three feet of him. Then he spoke:

"Who be you?"

He had a low voice, agreeable, even musical. Raven concluded he must have been strangely moved to break into that mad "Hullo." It had been more, he thought, that wild repetition with the echo throwing it back, like the Gabriel hounds. But Raven took no notice of the question. He spoke with a calculated peevishness.

"I'm willing to bet my knife is within three feet, and see how the confounded thing's hidden itself. It was right along here. Let me take your axe and I'll blaze a tree."

The man, without a word, passed him the axe and Raven notched a sapling. Then, still holding the axe,

he turned to the man with a smile. No one had ever told him what a charming smile it was. Anne used to wonder, in her dignified anguishes of love forbidden, if she could ever make him understand how he looked when he smiled.

"Well," said Raven, "who may you be?"

"My name's Tenney," said the man, in the low, vibrant voice.

"Oho!" said Raven, remembering Charlotte's confidences. Then, as Tenney frowned slightly and glanced at him in a questioning suspicion, he continued, "Then we're neighbors. My name's Raven."

The man nodded.

"They said you were comin'," he remarked.

He held out his hand for the axe. Raven, loath to give it to him, yet saw no excuse for withholding it. After all, she was safely locked in. So he tossed the axe and Tenney caught it lightly, and was turning away. But he stopped, considered a moment, looking down at the ground, and then, evidently concluding the question had to be put, broke out, and, Raven thought, shamefacedly:

"You seen anything of her up here?"

"Her?" Raven repeated, though he knew the country shyness over family terms.

"Yes. My woman."

"Your wife?" insisted Raven. "I don't believe I know her. No, I'm sure I don't. I've been away several years. On the road, you mean? No—not a soul."

A swift rage passed over Tenney's face. It licked it like a flash of evil light and Raven thought he saw how dangerous he could be.

"No," he said, "I don't mean on the road. I mean in the woods."

"Up here?" persisted Raven. "No, certainly not. This

is no place for a woman. A woman would have to be off her head to come traipsing up here in the snow. Is that what you were yelling about? I thought you were a catamount, at least."

He laughed. He had an idea, suddenly conceived, that the man, having a keen sense of personal dignity, was subject to ridicule, and that a laugh would be salutary for him. And he was right. Tenney straightened, put his axe over his shoulder, and walked away down the hill.

IX

Raven stood looking after him a minute and then began an ostentatious search for his knife, went to the little pile of brush and saw it—the steel tip of the handle shining there—and pulled the brush aside to get it. As he was rising with it in his hand, he saw Tenney turn and look back at him. He held up the knife and called:

"I've got it."

Tenney, not answering even by a sign, went on over the rise and disappeared below. Then Raven, after lingering a little to make sure he did not reappear, turned up the slope and into the path at the left and so came again to the hut. He unlocked the door and went in. She was sitting by the fire and the child was on the floor, staring rather vacuously at his little fingers, as if they interested him, but not much. The woman was looking at the child, but only in a mechanical sort of way, as if it were her job to look and she did it without intention even when the child was safe. But she was also watching the door, waiting for him; it was in an agony of expectation, and her eyes questioned him the instant he stepped in.

"Warm enough?" he inquired, as incidentally, he hoped, as if it were not unusual to find her here. "Let me throw on a log."

He did throw on two and the fire answered. The solemn child, who proved, at closer view, to have an unusual beauty of pink cheeks, blue eyes, and reddish hair, did not

intermit his serious gaze at his fingers. When Raven had put on the logs and dusted himself off, he found himself at a loss. How should he begin? Was Tenney, with his catamount yells and his axe, to be ignored altogether, or should he reassure her by telling her the man had gone? But she herself began.

"I suppose," she said, in the eloquent low voice that seemed to make the smallest word significant, "you think it's funny."

Raven knew what sense the word was meant to convey.

"No," he said, "not in the least. It's pretty bad for you, though," he added gravely, on second thought that he might.

She made a little gesture with her hand. It was a beautifully formed hand, but reddened with work. The gesture was as if she threw something away.

"He won't hurt me," she said.

"No," Raven returned, "I should hope not."

He drew up a chair to the hearth and was about to take it when she spoke again. The blood ran into her cheeks, as she did it, and she put her request with difficulty. It seemed to Raven that she was suddenly engulfed in shame.

"Should you just as soon," she asked, "take the key inside an' lock the door?"

She put it humbly, and Raven rose at once.

"Of course," he said. "Good idea."

He locked the door and came back to his chair and she began, never omitting to share her attention with the child:

"I know who you be. It's too bad this has come upon you. I'll have to ask you not to let it go any further."

Raven was about to assure her that nothing had come upon him, and then he bethought himself that a great deal had. She had looked to him like the Mother of Sor-

rows and, though the shock of that vision was over, she seemed to him now scarcely less touching in her beautiful maternity and her undefended state. So he only glanced at her and said gravely:

"Nobody will know anything about it from me. After all"—he was bound to reassure her if he could—"I've nothing to tell."

Her face flashed into an intensity of revolt against any subterfuge, the matter was so terrible.

"Why, yes, you have," said she. "Isr'el Tenney chased his woman up into the woods with an axe. An' you heard him yellin' after her. That's God's truth."

Raven felt rising in him the rage of the natural man, a passion of protection for the woman who is invincibly beautiful yet physically weak.

"An'," she went on, "you might ha' seen him out there, axe an' all."

"Oh," said Raven, as if it were of no great account, "I did see him."

"O my soul!" she breathed. "You see him? I'm glad you come in. He might ha' asked you if you'd seen me."

"He did."

This was a new terror and she was undone.

"How'd you do it?" she asked breathlessly. "You must ha' put it better'n I could or he'd be here now."

"I didn't 'put it,' " said Raven, easily. "I lied, and he went off down the hill."

Extravagant as it seemed, he did get an impression, like a flash, that she was disappointed in him because he had lied. But this was no time for casuistry. There were steps to be taken.

"You won't go back to him," he said, and said it definitively as if it were a matter he had thought out, said it like a command.

She stared at him.

"Not go back to him?" she repeated. "Why, I've got to go back to him. I've got to go home. Where do you expect I'm goin', if I don't go home?"

"Haven't you any people?" Raven asked her. "Can't you go to them?"

She laughed a little, softly, showing fine white teeth. The spell of her beauty was moving to him. He might never, he thought, have noticed her at all in other circumstances, if he had not seen her there in the woods and felt her need knock at his heart with the imperative summons of the outraged maternal. Was this the feeling rising in him that had made his mother's servitude to his father so sickening in those years gone by? Was the old string still throbbing? Did it need but a woman's hand to play upon it? And yet must he not have noted her, wherever they had met? Would not any man?

"I've got four brothers," she said. "They'd laugh at me. They'd tell me I'd married well an' got a better home than any of them could scrape together if they begun at the beginnin' an' lived their lives over. There's nothin' in Isr'el Tenney to be afraid of, they'd tell me. And there ain't—for them."

"No," said Raven quietly. He felt an intense desire to feel his way, make no mistakes, run no risk of shutting off her confidence. "It's a different thing for you."

Now she turned her face more fully upon him, in a challenging surprise.

"Why," she said, "I ain't afraid—except for him."

By the smallest motion of her hand she indicated the child, who was now, in sudden sleepiness, toppling back against the wall.

"Put him up here," said Raven, indicating the couch.

He opened the folded rug and held it until she had

disposed the little lax figure among the pillows. Then she took the rug from him and covered the child, with quick, capable movements of her beautiful worn hands. Raven, watching her, felt a clutch at his throat. Surely there was nothing in the known world of plastic action so wonderful as these movements of mothers' hands in their work of easing a child. With a last quick touch on the rug, drawing it slightly away from the baby cheek, she returned to her chair, and Raven again took his. He was afraid lest she repent her open-mindedness toward him and talk no more. But she was looking at him earnestly. It was evidently a part of her precautionary foresight that he should know. Did she think he could help her? His blood quickened at the thought. It seemed enough to have lived for, in so brutal a world. She veered for a moment from her terror to the necessity for justifying herself.

"You needn't think," she said, almost aggressively, "I'd talk to everybody like this."

He was holding himself down to a moderation he knew she wanted, and replied:

"No, of course not. But you can talk to me."

"Yes," she said, "I can." She dismissed that, having said it, as if she saw no need of finding the underlying reasons they were both going by. "You see," she said, "it's the baby. When he gits one o' them spells, it's the baby he pitches on."

Raven picked out from her confusion of pronouns the fact that Tenney, in his spells, incredibly threatened the baby.

"Don't you think," he said, "you make too much of it—I mean, as to the baby. He wouldn't hurt his own child."

Again the blood ran into her cheeks, and she looked a suffering so acute that Raven got up and walked through

the room to the window. It seemed an indecency to scan the anguished page of her face.

"That's it," she said, in a strangled voice. "When he has his spells he don't believe the baby's his."

"God!" muttered Raven. He turned and came back to her. "You don't mean to live with him," he said. "You can't. You mustn't. The man's a brute."

She was looking up at him proudly.

"But," she said, "baby is his own child."

"Good God! of course it is," broke out Raven, in a fever of impatience. "Of course it's his child. You don't need to tell me that."

Then, incredibly, she smiled and two dimples appeared at the corners of her mouth and altered her face from a mask of tragic suffering to the sweetest playfulness.

"You mustn't say 'it,'" she reproved him. "You must say 'he.' Anybody'd know you ain't a family man."

Raven stood looking at her a moment, his own smile coming. Then he sat down in his chair. He wanted to tell her how game she was, and there seemed no way to manage it. But now he could ask her questions. Her friendliness, her amazing confidence, had opened the door.

"Exactly what do you mean?" he asked, yet cautiously, for even after her own avowals he might frighten her off the bough. "Does he drink?"

She looked at him reprovingly.

"No, indeed," she said. "He's a very religious man."

"The devil he is!" Raven found himself muttering, remembering the catamount yells and the axe. "Then what," he continued, with as complete an air as he could manage of taking it as all in the day's work, "what do you mean by his spells?"

She was silent a moment. Her mind seemed to be going back.

"He gits—mad," she said slowly. "Crazy, kind of. It's when he looks at baby and baby looks different to him.

"Different? How different?"

"Why," she said, in a burst of pride turning for an instant to the little figure on the couch, "baby's got awful cunnin' little ways. An' he's got a little way o' lookin' up sideways, kind o' droll, an' when he does that an' Mr. Tenney sees it"—here Raven glanced at her quickly, wondering what accounted for her being so scrupulous with her "Mr. Tenney"—"he can't help noticin' it an' he can't help thinkin' how baby ain't colored like either of us—we're both dark——"

There she stopped, at last in irreparable confusion, and Raven was relieved. How could he let her, he had been thinking, go on with the sordid revelation? When he spoke, it was more to himself than to her, but conclusively:

"The man's a beast."

"No, he ain't," said she indignantly. "Baby's light complected. You see he is. An' I'm dark an' so's Mr. Tenney. An' I told him—I told him about me before we were married, an' he thought he could stand it then. But we went over to the county fair an' he see—*him.* He come up an' spoke to him, that man did, spoke to us both, an' Mr. Tenney looked at him as if he never meant to forgit him, an' he ain't forgot him, not a minute since. He's light complected, blue eyes an' all. An' he stood there, that man did, talkin' to us, kinder laughin' an' bein' funny, an' all to scare me out o' my life for fear o' what he'd say. He didn't say a word he hadn't ought to, an' when he'd had his joke he walked off. But he had just that way o' lookin' up kinder droll, an' baby's got it. Mr. Raven, for God's sake tell me why my baby's got to look like that man?"

She was shaking him into a passion as unendurable as her own. He had never felt such pity for any human being, not even the men blinded and broken in the War. And he understood her now. Even through his belief in her, that sudden belief born of her beauty and her extremity, he had been amazed at her accepting him so absolutely. Now he saw. He was her last hope and perhaps because he was different from the neighbors to whom she could not speak, she was throwing herself into the arms of his compassion. And she had to hurry lest she might not see him again. He sat there, his hands clenched between his knees, his head bent. He must not look at her.

"Poor chap!" he said finally, his altered thoughts now on Tenney. "He's jealous."

She broke into a sob that seemed to rend her and then pulled herself up and sat silent. But he could see, from her shadowy outline through his oblique vision, that she was shaking horribly.

"Can't you," he said, "make him understand, make him see how—how tremendously you love him?"

That was pretty mawkish, he thought, as he said it, but he meant it, he meant volumes more. Flood the man with kindness, open the doors of her beauty and let him see how really incorruptible she was, how loyal, how wronged. For, with every minute of her company, he was the more convinced of her inviolate self. Whatever the self had been through, now it was motherhood incarnate. What was she saying to this last?

"Be nice to him?" she asked, "that kind o' way?" And he saw, as she did, that he had meant her to drown the man's jealous passion in passion of her own. "He thinks," she said bitterly, "that's the kind o' woman I am."

Then he looked with her upon the barricaded road of her endeavor.

"I can't even," she said, "have the house pretty when he comes home an' be dressed up so's he'll have a pleasant evenin' but he thinks—that's the kind o' woman I am." The last she said as if she had said it many times before and it held the concentrated bitterness of her hateful life. "An'," she added, turning upon him and speaking fiercely, as if he had been the one to accuse her, "it's true. It is the kind o' woman I am. An' I don't want to be. I want to set down with my sewin' an' watch the baby playin' round. What is it about me? What makes 'em foller me an' offer me things an' try, one way or another, to bring me down? What is it?"

She was panting with the passion of what seemed an accusation of him with all mankind. He added one more to his list of indictments against nature as God had made it. Here she was, a lure, innocent, he could have sworn, backed up against the defenses of her ignorance, and the whole machinery of nature was moving upon her, seeking, with its multitudinous hands, to pull her in and utilize her for its own ends.

"Never mind," he said harshly. "Don't try to understand things. You can't. We can't any of us. Only I'll tell you how you looked to me, that first minute. You looked like the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ."

She shrank a little. He had touched, he saw, innocent prejudices.

"Are you a Roman Catholic?" she asked.

"No," he said, "not that nor anything. But you see how good you looked to me. It doesn't hurt any of us to be Catholic, if we're good."

"I didn't mean anything," she said humbly. "Only there ain't many round here."

"You say your husband is religious. Does he go to church?"

"Yes," she answered soberly, and also with a kind of wonder at a man's accomplishing so dull an observance. "We go twice every Sunday, an' Sunday school an' evenin' meetin' besides."

"Do you like it?"

"No," she said, looking rueful, as if trusting he might forgive her. "I git sleepy."

At this Raven laughed and she glanced at him mildly, as if wondering what he had found to please him. He had been thinking.

"Now," he said, "we must plan what you're going to do. You won't let me send you and the baby away to stay awhile?"

She shook her head.

"Then what are we going to do? Can't you let me go to him and tell him, man to man, what an infernal fool he is?"

A wild alarm flew into her face.

"No! no!" she said.

"What is going to happen? You can't go home."

"Oh, yes, I can," said she. "I always do. It works off. Maybe it's worked off now. He gits all wore out actin' the way he does, an' then he's terrible scared for fear I've made way with myself, an' he's all bowed down."

"Oh!" said Raven. "And you've got him where you want him. And you settle down and wait for another spell. How long do you generally stay away?"

"Long's I can," she answered simply. "Till I'm afraid baby'll git cold. I keep his little things where I can ketch 'em up an' run. But sometimes he 'most gits a chill."

The yearning of anxiety in her voice was intense

enough, he thought, to balance the grief of all the mothers bereft by Herod.

"I don't see," he said, "how you get up here anyway. You must come by the road? Why doesn't he follow you?"

The slow red surged into her face. She was hesitating. There was evidently worse to come.

"He gits so mad," she said, with frequent pauses between the words, "he don't stay in the house after he's had a spell. I guess he don't dare to. He's afraid of what he'll do. He goes out an' smashes away at the woodpile or suthin.' An' it's then I ketch up the baby an' run. I go out the side door an' up the road a piece an' into the back road. Then I come down the loggin' road the back way an' end up here. It's God's mercy," she said passionately, "they've broke out that loggin' road or there wouldn't be any path an' he'd see my tracks in the snow."

"Then," said Raven, "if he has sense enough to go and work it off on the woodpile, perhaps you aren't in any real danger, after all."

She looked at him piteously. Her eyes narrowed with a frowning return to a scene of terror past and persistently avoided in retrospect.

" 'Most always," she said, in a low tone, "it comes on him ag'in, an' then, 'fore you know it, he's back in the house. Once he brought the axe with him. Baby was in the cradle. The cradle head's split right square acrost."

"Good God!" said Raven. "And you won't let me send you away from here?"

"Why, Mr. Raven," said she, and her voice was only less exquisite in its tenderness than when she spoke of the baby, "ain't I married to him?"

They sat looking at each other, and the suffused beauty

of her face was so moving to him that he got up and went to the window and stared out at the tree branches in their winter calm. He made himself stand there looking at them and thinking persistently of them, not of her. She would not bear thinking of, this thing of beauty and need and, at the same time, inexorability of endurance. Unless she would let him help her, he was only driving the hot ploughshare of her misery through his own heart for nothing. So he stood there, mechanically studying the trees and remembering how they would wake from this frozen calm on a night when the north wind got at them and made them thrash at one another in the fury of their destiny. Her voice recalled him.

"I don't mean," she said, "to make you feel bad. I hadn't ought to put it on anybody else's shoulders, anyway."

Then Raven realized that the tenderness in her voice was for him. He turned and came back to his place by the fire. But he did not sit. He stood looking at her as she looked anxiously up at him.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said, "for the present, anyway. I'm going now, and you're to stay here as long as you think best. When you go, lock the door and put the key under the flat stone out by the step. I often leave the key there. I'll make sure the stone isn't frozen down. Now, you understand, don't you? You're to come up here whenever you like. If there isn't a fire, you're to build one. Nobody will disturb you. Jerry won't be cutting up here. I'll send him down into the lower woods."

"But," she said, in evident concern, "I can't do that. You come up here to write your books. Mr. Tenney said so, when he was tellin' me who all the neighbors were. He said you had the shack repaired so's to write your books."

Raven smiled. Books seemed far removed from this naked face of life.

"I'm not writing books now," he said. "I'm just hanging round. I may go over and see your husband, ask him to do some work for me."

The quick look of alarm ran into her face.

"Oh," she breathed, "you won't——"

"No," he answered steadily, "I won't say a word about you. Of course I sha'n't. And I won't to anybody."

"An'," she broke in tumultuously, "if you should see me —oh, it's an awful thing to say, after what you've done for me this day—but you won't act as if you ever see me before?"

That was the only wisdom, Raven saw, but a band seemed to tighten about his heart. Deny her before men, she whom he had not yet untangled from the rapt vision of their meeting?

"No," he said, "I won't even look at you. Now I'm going. I'll loosen up the stone."

She rose to her imposing height and came to him where he stood, his hand on the latch. Her eyes brimmed. In the one glance he had of her, he thought such extremity of gratitude might, in another instant, break in a flood of words.

"Go back," he said, "where nobody can see you when I open the door. Jerry may have taken a notion to come up."

She turned obediently and he did not look at her again. He opened the door and stepped out. The stone was there beside the larger one below the sill. He bent and wrenched it up from the ground where the frost was holding it, and with such unregarding force that the edges hurt his hands. He smiled a little at the savage satisfaction of the act, wondering if this was how Tenney felt

when he smashed away at the wood. Then he remembered that the key was inside, tapped on the door, opened it and spoke to her:

"You'd better lock the door. Keep it locked till you go."

She was sitting before the fire, her head bent almost to her knee, her face in her hands. He closed the door and waited until he heard her step and the turning of the key. Then he strode out into the logging road and down the slope. One certainty surged and trembled in him: that he had never been so sorry for anybody in his life.

X

Raven, determinedly shedding his emotion, plunged fast down the hill and into the house where Charlotte was busy in a steam of fragrances from stove and cooking table and Jerry sat smoothing an axe helve.

"See here," said Raven, pulling off his gloves and advancing to the stove, where Jerry, looking mildly up, made room for him, "are you thinning out up on the ridge?"

Jerry nodded.

"That's what you wrote," said he.

"I've changed my mind," said Raven. "It looks mighty well up there as it is, for the present, anyway. Didn't you say there was a lot of gray birch that needed to go down in the river pasture?"

Again Jerry nodded, and Charlotte, evidently not finding this definite enough, put in:

"Why, yes, Jerry, seems to me you said so. 'Twas in that letter you had me write."

"Well," said Raven, "I want you to get at the river woods. I want 'em cleaned up. Couldn't you get somebody to help you? That man Tenney, how about him?"

Jerry, confronted by haste and emergency, two flying visitants he never could encounter adequately, opened his mouth and looked at Charlotte.

"Why, yes," said she. "He's a great hand to work. You said so yourself, Jerry, only last week."

"Then what if we should hire him?" said Raven. "What if I should go up and ask him now?"

Jerry was slowly coming to.

"He's been by here to-day," said he, "axe in his hand. Went as if he's sent for. Then he went back."

"Well, that was an hour or more ago," said Charlotte. "You says to me, 'Where's he be'n?' says you. Yes, he's got home long 'fore this. You'll find him some'r's round home."

"All right," said Raven. "Don't go up on the ridge again, Jerry. I want it left as it is."

He hurried out through the shed and Charlotte and Jerry exchanged glances, his entirely bemused and she sympathetically tender.

" 'Course he don't want you cuttin' on the ridge," she said. "He's goin' up there to write his books. I should think you could see that."

For Charlotte, when no third person was by to observe Jerry's sloth at the uptake, had methods of her own to keep him mentally alive. If he did lag a pace behind, it was his secret and hers, and sometimes, between themselves, it was wholesome to recognize it.

Raven walked at top speed. He could not, at his utmost, get to Tenney soon enough. It was true, he was under vow not to assault or accuse him, but it seemed to him the woman would not be even intermittently safe unless the man were under his eye. As the picture of her flashed again to his mind, sitting by his hearth, her head bowed in grief unspeakable, he wondered what he should call her. Surely not, in his rage against Tenney, by Tenney's name. She was "the woman," she was the pitiful type of all suffering womanhood.

There was the house, rather narrow in build, but painted white, with green blinds. The narrowness gave it a look

of unwelcoming meagerness, this although it was of a good size. Raven wondered why some minds ran to pointed roofs, inhospitable to the eye. This looked to him like Tenney, his idea of him. The barn was spacious, and beautiful in silver gray, and the woodpile, Raven decided ironically, a marvel of artistic skill. He had never seen such a big woodpile, so accurately trimmed at the corners, so perfect in the face of an extended length. It must, he judged, represent a good many hours of jealous madness, if it was entirely the product of those outbreaks when Tenney went out to smash wood. And there, round one corner of the pile, was Tenney himself. Raven realized that he had not expected to find him. Actually he had believed the man was raging over snowy hillsides somewhere about, armed with his axe and uttering those catamount cries. Tenney was not at work. He was standing perfectly still, looking up the road.

"Hullo!" called Raven, turning into the yard, and the man jerked back a step and then stopped and awaited him.

It was not a step actually. His feet did not leave the ground. He merely, his whole body, seemed thrown out of position, to recover instantly. Raven, watching him as he traversed the few steps between them, decided that he was uncontrollably nervous, frightened, too, perhaps, at what his apprehensive mind pictured: and that was good for him. What was Tenney, according to his look? Raven, scrutinizing him as he approached, determined to know something more than he had caught from those preoccupied minutes in the woods. How, if he had his pen in hand, would he describe Israel Tenney for one of the folk tales Anne had so persistently urged him to? A thin, tall man with narrow shoulders and yet somehow giving an impression of great wiry strength. He had a

boldly drawn line of profile, hair black and glossy and, as Raven saw with distaste, rather long under his hat, vertical lines marking his cheeks, lines deeper than seemed justified by his age, and, as he had noted before, his eyes were also black with a spark in them. What was the spark? It was, Raven concluded again, in this quick scrutiny, like that in the eyes of inventors and visionaries. He wore clothes so threadbare that it seemed as if he must have been cold. But they were patched with a scrupulous nicety that made some revulsion in Raven rise up and dramatically spur him to a new resentment. She had patched them. Her faithful needle had spent its art on this murderer of her peace. He had reached the woodpile now and Tenney came a step forward.

"Great woodpile you've got here," said Raven.

Tenney put out his hand and rested it on one of the sticks. He might have been caressing a pet dog.

"Stove wood length," he said briefly. Then he seemed to feel some curiosity over being sought out after their meeting on the rise and asked: "D'you find your knife?"

"Why, yes," said Raven. "Didn't you see me hold it up to you?"

Tenney nodded, frowning. He seemed to conclude he was giving himself away, showing more interest in the stranger than the stranger had in any way earned. But he asked another question. It leaped from him. He had to ask it.

"D'you see anybody up round there after I come down?"

Raven shook his head, looking, he hoped, vague.

"I came down myself," he said. "I had to talk with Jerry about his thinning out."

The eagerness faded from Tenney's face.

"I didn't see Jerry up there this mornin'," he vol-

unteered, in an indifferent contribution toward the talk.

"No," said Raven. "You won't see him up there at all after this—for a spell, that is. I write, you know, books. I like to go up to the hut to work. Not so likely to be interrupted there. I don't want chopping going on."

Tenney, with a quick lift of the head, looked at him questioningly. Raven saw anger also in the look, at last anger ready to spring. Both men had the same thought. Tenney wondered if the owner of the wood was going to taunt him again with yelling like a catamount, and Raven did actually put aside an impulse toward it.

"D'you come over here to forbid my goin' up in your woods?" Tenney inquired.

"No," said Raven. "I came to ask you if you could help Jerry do some thinning out in the river pasture. I'm rather in a hurry about that."

"Why, yes," Tenney began. Then he added breathlessly, as if another part of his mind (the suffering, uncontrolled part) broke in on his speech: "Not yet, though. I can't do anything yet, not till I see how things turn."

Raven thought he understood. Tenney could settle to nothing until he knew when his wife was coming back or whether she was coming at all. Now that the vision of her had entered on their stage, he was conscious of answering coldly:

"All right. You can make up your mind and go over and see Jerry. He'll arrange it with you."

On these words, he was about turning away, when he found Tenney suddenly oblivious of him. The man's thin face was quivering into a pathetic disorder, flushed, quite beyond his control. He neither heard Raven nor saw him, though he did speak brokenly:

"There!" he said. "There she is now."

Raven, turning, followed his gaze, directed up the road, not the way he had come. There she was, walking toward them with swift, long steps, the child held with the firmness that still seemed a careless buoyancy, as he had seen her in the woods. She had come home, as she went, the back way. Raven could have stood there through the long minute, motionless, waiting for her to come to him, for it seemed as if it were to him she came, not Tenney. But he recalled himself with a brusqueness so rough and sudden that it was as if he gave himself a blow. That last glance had shown him she had nothing more to fear from Tenney, for this time at least. The man had been horribly frightened at her going. Now he was under her heel. Raven did not give her another look. He turned homeward, and called back to Tenney loudly enough for her to overhear him and be under no apprehension as to what had passed:

"Make up your mind, then come and talk it over with Jerry. It's chopping, you understand, gray birches down in the river pasture."

Tenney did not answer, and Raven, striding along the road, listened with all possible intentness to hear whether husband and wife spoke together. He thought not, but he did hear the closing of a door.

XI

Thyatira—this was her name, and she was called Tira —passed her husband apparently without a glance. Nevertheless she had, in approaching, become adequately aware of his disordered look, and the fact of it calmed her to a perfect self-possession. She could always, even from one of these fleeting glimpses, guess at the stage his madman's progress had reached, and the present drop in temperature restored her everyday sense of safety. With it came a sudden ebbing of energy and endurance. The "spell" was over for the time, but her escape from the shadow of it left her nerveless and almost indifferent to its returning; apathetic, too, to her tormentor. Going in, she closed the door behind her, apparently not noticing that he followed her, and when he opened it and came in, she was sitting in his great chair by the fire, taking off the baby's coat, and, with the capable, anxious mother motion, feeling the little hands. Tenney came up to her and the child, turning at his step, looking up at him solemnly. Tira's heart seemed to contract within her. This was the very glance, "lookin' up kinder droll," that had brought on the storm. But for Tenney it evidently meant something now that fitted his mood of passionate anxiety to get back into the warm security of domestic peace.

"You lemme take him," he said, "whilst you git off your things. You'll ketch your death o' cold, carryin' on so."

The last he had to add. She was, his defensive inner mind told him, all wrong in flying out of the house "like a crazed creatur' " when she might have stayed and told him, just told him, whether she was the kind of woman he, at these unheralded mad moments, thought she was. That was the undercurrent always in his mind: if she wouldn't be so still and hateful, if she would only tell him. She might have some pity on a man, that defensive inner mind advised him, when she saw him all worked up. But the minute he warned her the devil of doubt was again tempting him, she began to freeze up and wouldn't speak to him at all. No wonder, with that devil inside whispering to him and hounding him on—no wonder he said things and—he trembled here and dared not follow out that thought—and was afraid he might do things. But she shook her head, at his offer of taking the child.

"You might go an' cut a slice o' ham," she said wearily. "It's 'most dinner time. We might 's well have that as anything."

But the baby reached out and closed his little fingers about Tenney's thumb. Tenney stood there, his heart swelling within him at the contrast between the child's forgivingness and her cruelty. Now she had the child's outer things off, and she rose with them in one hand, carrying the child on the other arm, and it was her movement that dragged the little fingers away and broke that significant clasp on Tenney's thumb. How hateful she could be, he thought, his heart swelling more and more. He stood where she left him, and she went to the low couch and set the baby down there, and put into his hand a formless doll she wanted him to love. He never really noticed it, but she felt he would sometime love the doll. Then she glanced, with the air of being recalled to a wearisome routine, at the table in the middle of the floor;

it meant ham and eggs. It seemed also to occur to her that she had not taken off her cloak, and she hung it on its nail behind the door. Soon, as Tenney, still motionless there by the stove, seemed mutely accusing her, mutely imploring her not to be cruel, she did turn and look at him. The thought of Raven was uppermost in her mind. It had been there every minute since she had gone into his house in the woods, but now it roused compellingly, stronger than even her present apprehension. Most of all, she was penetrated by a wonder almost greater than any emotion she had ever felt, at having laid before him at once and without persuasion, the story of her life. Why should she have told him? She would have said no decent woman could betray her husband to another man. It was entirely mysterious, and she gave it up. But there was, behind the wonder, a dazzling sense that he was different. As he had told her that strange thing she hardly dared think of now, because it seemed as if she must have misunderstood him—the thing about her looking so good and wonderful when he came upon her—so he, in his kindness and compassion, his implication of assuming a mysterious responsibility for her, seemed unbelievably good, not a citizen of this bleak neighborhood—or even the world (her mind, though stumblingly, ran as far as that) and, more astounding still, the real miracle was that he had been sent for this: to save her. And at that moment of dazed reflection, it all meant the passionate necessity of obeying him. He had bade her show her husband how she loved him. Seeing the man was jealous, he had pitied him. Perhaps she had not thought, since these last apprehensive days with Tenney, whether she loved him or not. He had simply, at the times of recurrent tragedy, been the terror within the house, and she had lived a life of breathless consecration to the one task of saving the

child. Did she love him? Raven had assumed she did, and in her devotion to him she must, in some form, obey. Almost it seemed to her there would be shame in not loving her husband, if Raven expected it of her. None of these things were formulated in her mind. They were only shadowy impulses, like the forces of nature, persuading, impelling her. She had no words; she had scarcely, as to the abstractions she dimly felt and never saw, any reasoned thought. But she did have an unrecognized life of the emotions, and this was surging in her now.

She stood for a second looking at Tenney, the distended beauty of her eyes like a question, a challenge. She seemed, though this neither of them could know, to be beseeching him to tell her what treatment he deserved of her, or what would make their case whole. They were simple people, these two, but she had leaped, without knowing it herself, to a new plane of life. She was still with Raven in the hut, trying to speak his language, follow out his thought for her. She gave a little quick rush across the room and, to Tenney's overwhelming surprise, her hands were on his shoulders, her face so close to his that her sweet breath fanned him. He had never seen her so. She had to be pursued, coaxed, tired out with persuasion before she would even accept the warmth he too often had for her.

"Isr'el," she said, "Isr'el Tenney! if you ever ag'in, so long as you live, think wrong o' that baby there, you'll be the wickedest man on God's earth."

His arms closed about her and she stood passive. Yet she wanted to free herself. Did she love him? The question Raven had seemed to illuminate kept beating on in her tired head. Did she love him? And as Tenney's arms clung closer and his lips were on hers, she threw back her head and cried violently:

"No, I don't."

"Don't what?" he asked, releasing her slightly, and she drew away from him and, still obeying Raven, made one disordered effort at assurance.

"If you think"—here she stopped. She could not go on. It had always seemed to her a wrong to the baby to put the vile suspicion into words. "If you think," she tried again, "what you said this mornin'—O Isr'el, I've been as true to you as you are to your God."

He was religious, she often told herself, chiefly in her puzzled musings after a "spell" was over, and this was the strongest vow she could imagine. But it disconcerted him.

"There! there!" he said. "Don't say such things."

Evidently the name of God was for Sundays. But he was uneasily reassured. He was, at least, in a way of sense, delighted. He put his face to hers and thickly bade her kiss him. He was not for the moment horrible to her unconsenting will. Rather she found herself rejoicing. When she could escape from him (and she felt no fear, her wild belief in herself was so great) she thought she could dance and sing. For now she knew she did not love him, and it made her feel so free. Always there had been some uneasy bond, first with the man who cajoled her to her heart-break and the miserable certainty that, whatever magic was in a good name, it was hers no more, and then with Tenney, whom she had followed humbly, gratefully, because he had been so kind and told her nothing mattered if she would marry him. But now she felt a sudden snapping of the bond and she knew that, in her mind, at least, in her moments of solitude with the baby, she could dance upon the hills of life. It was an entirely new sense of ecstasy, a thrilling of her

blood. She laughed out, a low, excited laugh, and put him from her and called gaily:

"You slice the ham, an' I'll git out some eggs."

Tenney stared at her a minute, perplexed and wondering. Then his face relaxed slightly. It might have been said he smiled. There was apparently a good feeling in the house, such as he had never been able to create. She had always been kind, conformable, but she had never laughed like this, nor in his sight taken up the baby and tossed him until he, too, laughed gurglingly. She cooked the dinner and Tenney, not able to take himself out of her bewildering presence, hung about and watched her and, when the baby began to fret for food, took him up and walked with him until Tira was free. And while they ate dinner the baby slept again on the lounge: for the cradle, grim witness Tenney could not bring himself to look at now, had been moved into the bedroom.

"D'you see that feller jest goin' when you come into the yard?" Tenney asked her, when his first hunger was over and he leaned back in his chair to look at her where she sat, only picking at her food, he thought anxiously. She seemed queer to him to-day, with the rapt, exalted look of one who had seen strange things and been tired by them, the tremulous eloquence of her lips. She was, he owned to himself, yet not with any satisfaction, because any smallest allurement in her lessened his chance of keeping her faith inviolate, a likely looking woman.

"I wish," he said irritably, out of his uneasiness over her, "you'd eat suthin.' You're all beat out."

She smiled at him. She felt kindly toward him as to a part of the world that had at least begun to show its softer side to her.

"No," she said, "I ain't beat out."

"D'you see him?" he pursued, his thoughts recurring to Raven.

"Yes," she responded, in a low tone, "I see him."

" 'Twas Raven. You knew he was comin' up to stay a spell. Don't ye remember I see Jerry an' he told me? He wants me to go down in his river pastur', choppin'. All of a whew to git at it. Jest like them city folks. If a thing comes into their head, they'll shake the footstool but they'll git it."

"Yes," said Tira. "I think 's likely."

She got up to bring the pie, warming in the oven, and when her back was toward him she allowed herself a smile, happy, unrestrained, at Raven's thought for her. She knew why Tenney was to be drawn off down to the river pasture. This was a part of Raven's understanding and his beneficence.

"You goin' ?" she asked, returning to her chair.

"Yes," said Tenney. "Might 's well."

When he had eaten he went out to his chores and she cleared the table and walked about the house with a light step. She had been working heavily of late, with a dull mind, but now there seemed to be a reason for doing every task as perfectly as it could be done. There was not a suspicion in her mind that Raven had a charm for her or that she could possibly have a charm for him. He had simply opened a window for the light to come in; he had shown her the door of escape. This was the first simple kindness she had ever had. When she was little, the family life had been a disorderly struggle for bare existence, and as she grew into an ignorant girlhood she began to be angrily conscious that she herself, she who did not recognize the power of her own beauty and with it the strange force that lay beneath it, like a philter, for man's undoing, was an object of pursuit by men made

mad through passions she hated. She had the simplest tastes, the most inconsiderable desires. She would go off by herself then and spend a day wandering about the woods, cooling her feet in brooks, sleeping under a tree. No man could make her happiness completer, hanging about her steps, staring her down with bold, impudent eyes. She even thought, in a formless way (for she had no orderly inner life of wonder and conclusion) whether she should have taken refuge with the light-haired man who was now driving Tenney to madness, if he had not had that drollery of looking at you, like a boy really, who cared only for a boy's fitful fun. But he was not kind. The kindness had been only to lure her into trusting him, just as Tenney's had turned into a rage of abusive jealousy. Raven's kindness was different. It was not in any degree personal to her. She knew he would have been as merciful to a squirrel caught in a trap. And the scars of his own mental sufferings and restraints had done something to him, something inexplicable that made him wonderful in her eyes. He seemed, too, all-powerful. He was that miraculous combination of the human guide and heavenly helper, with the wisdom to understand earthly trouble and the power to administer what remedy there might be.

Tenney did not come in until supper time. He had been over to Raven's, he told her, and seen Jerry about the chopping. They were going in the morning early. She made no reply. She was still at peace in the thought of Raven's kindness, but the turmoil of the day had told on her, and she was so tired that she could scarcely drag herself about; her eyes kept closing as she moved. Tenney was still expectantly eager for an awakening of her leniency. At eight o'clock he brought out the Bible and stiffened himself into the rigidity that was the mail for

his spiritual combats. He was always referring to himself, at these times of religious observance, as a servant of the Cross, and Tira used wearily to wonder whether he felt obliged to arrange himself for combats that, so far as she knew, never seemed to come off. There was a mysterious adversary he was always describing with an apprehension that made her wonder if Israel could really be afraid, and if that was why he announced so belligerently that he was ready for him. Neither of them thought of the combat as being simply the grim fight the will of men is doomed to on the dark plain of man's mysterious sojourn. It seemed to them outside somewhere, dramatic, imminent, and yet, if you prayed loudly enough and read your chapter, not certain to happen at all. At least this seemed to be what Tenney thought, and Tira, when she dwelt upon it, sleepily followed him. To-night he was reading in Revelation, and when he had finished that, he would begin, in due course, at Genesis, and go on with an iron persistency of accomplishment as methodical as ploughing a field. Tira, sitting at her side of the hearth, heard, through drowsy ears, the incomprehensible vision of the tree of life with its twelve manner of fruits, and when Israel shut the Bible with an air of virtuous finality, she came awake and sat guiltily upright.

"You've been asleep," he accused her frowningly. "Anybody'd think you could keep yourself awake over the Word o' God."

Tira leaned back in her chair and yawned with the simplicity of the natural animal. Tenney caught his breath, the redness of her mouth and the gleam of her teeth were so bewitching to him. He got up and carried away the Bible. When he came back from the best room she was moving about, setting away chairs and then brushing up the few chips on the hearth.

"I'm beat out," she acknowledged, with a wistful look at him, half deprecating humility. "I guess I'll poke off to bed."

"Yes," said Tenney, "le's go."

At that minute there was a little waking call from the bedroom off the sitting-room. Tenney gave her a startled glance.

"Why," he said, "you got him in there?"

They had been used to keeping the baby covered on the kitchen or the sitting-room couch until their own bedtime and Tenney, preoccupied with his last chore of reading the Scriptures, had not noticed that his wife had carried him into the bedroom instead.

"Yes," she said, with a significant quiet. "I thought 'twas full warmer in the bed. I'm goin' to stay with him."

"In there?" Tenney repeated. "All night?"

She nodded at him. The afternoon brightness was again on her face, and for an instant he felt afraid of her, she looked so strange. Then he laughed a little. He thought he understood, and, advancing, put a hand on her shoulder and spoke in an awkward tenderness.

"Here," said he, "you ain't afraid o' me, be you? Why, I wouldn't no more lay hands on him——"

He had meant to add that she had reassured him by her disclaimer of the morning. But he could not quite manage that. Words were not his servants. They were his enemies, especially at such times as he was mad with rage. Then they came too fast and got the better of him, and he could hardly ever remember afterward what they were. Tira slipped from under his hand and continued her ordered tasks about the room. But she smiled at him in the friendliest way.

"Oh, no," she said, "I ain't the leastest mite afraid." She laughed a little, in a manner mystifying to him, for it

suddenly seemed to her she should never be afraid of anything again.

Tenney stood there, his eyes following her as she moved about the room, and again the thought of her cruelty possessed him. Last of all her orderly deeds, she lighted a little lamp and set it on the table near him.

"Don't you forgit to blow it out," she warned him. "I'm terrible afraid o' fire, these winter nights. I won't put out the big lamp yet. I can see to undress by it, an' then baby won't wake up."

He took his lamp and set it down again and went to the bedroom door, her eyes following him.

"I dunno," he said, in a strangled voice, "as there's any need o' that in there, for folks to tumble over."

He stepped inside, took up the cradle with the telltale gash in the hood, carried it through the kitchen and set it outside the door, in the shed.

"I'll carry it up into the shed chamber tomorrer," he said, in the same tortured voice.

Then he took his lamp and turned to go. He was as much surprised at himself as she could have guessed. For some reason—and he did not know the reason—he could not bear to leave her there in the dark with the silent witness standing by to cry out against him. Yet this he did not think. He only knew he must get the cradle out of the room and do it quickly. When he had reached the door to the enclosed staircase, her voice halted him so abruptly that the light quivered in his hand.

"Isr'el," it called, "you're real good. Don't you be cold. There's a blanket on the foot."

But though he hesitated another minute, the voice had nothing more for him, and he went slowly up to bed. As he undressed, his thoughts down there with her, he wondered how her voice could have sounded so gay.

In the middle of the night, Tira woke suddenly, with the sense of something near. There was the moon flooding the little room, and in the doorway stood a figure.

"That you, Isr'el?" she called clearly.

"Yes," he said, and then hesitated, "you all right?"

"Yes," she answered, in the same clear voice, with something commanding in it now. "We're all right. You go back to bed, so's to git your sleep. I'll call you if I'm up first."

Tenney turned away, and she heard his hesitating step through the kitchen and on the stairs. Then, as if this had been as commonplace an interlude in her night as the baby's waking and drowsing off again, she felt herself surging happily away to sleep.

XII

Raven, tired to lethargy by the morning's turmoil, stayed in the house until after dinner. He sat by the library fire, a book on his knee, chiefly to convince Charlotte, who would inevitably detect his drop in responsive liveliness, that he was merely absorbed and not moping. Once or twice she did appear at the door, plainly to look at him, but, finding he kept his eyes on the page, she did not speak. The life had gone out of him. He wondered at himself for being so fagged. Yet it had been a good deal of a strain, that anguish of a creature he was not allowed to help; it was exacting a heavy penalty. He found his mind dwelling on it, look by look, word by word, and finding no relief except in the thought of Tenney in the river pasture, chopping. If that came to pass, the woman would be safe for hours she could count upon.

That afternoon, Jerry reported that Tenney had been over and promised to appear next morning with his axe. Then Raven went off for a walk along the road skirting the base of the mountain. Possibly he chose it because it led to the woman's old home, and the thought of her was uppermost in his mind. The road itself was still and dark, subdued to a moving silence, it might almost seem, by the evergreens, watchers on the high cliff at the left, and the quiet of the river, now under ice, on the other side below. He kept on to the stepping stones, at the verge of the scattered settlement of Mountain

Brook. They were rough granite at regular distances apart, only the tops of them visible above the ice, and they made the concluding stage of the walk across lots from Wake Hill to Mountain Brook. In spring the water swirled about them madly, and it was one of the adventures of boyhood for a squad to go over to the stepping stones and leap from one to another without splashing into the foam below. This was "playing Moosewood," the Indian who had been found there drowned, whether by his own act because the local palefaces had got his hill-top, over beyond, or from prolonged fire-water, no one knew. But always he was a noble red man and one boy acted his despairing part, and the others hunted him across the stones. In the game, he always escaped and "shinnied" up the cliff opposite, by fissures the boys of every generation knew, and struck a pose among the evergreens above, whooping down defiance.

Raven stopped there and gave a thought to the boy he had been, and then to Anne, who had once taken the walk across lots with him, and who, when he told her how they used to play Moosewood, insisted on crossing, though he had tried to dissuade her, noting her foolish shoes, and aware that she had no adroitness of eye and muscle. But she had a will of steel in these matters, as well as those of the spirit, and would not be prevailed on. Three of the daring leaps she made from one stone to another and at the fourth she slipped and he caught and held her, the delicate slenderness of her, in his arms. He had felt awkward merely and sorry for her, she so overprized doing things superlatively well, and when they reached the bank she was flushed and shaken, and again he was sorry, it seemed so slight a thing to care about. But as he looked down there now he was thinking really about her he called "the woman" in his mind. She would not slip. She was

as perfectly adapted in every tempered muscle to the rough conditions of natural life as the pioneer women who helped their men clear the wilderness and set hearthstones. It darkened between the firs and they began to stir a little, as if a wind were coming up, and he turned back home, again growing uneasy about her, shut up there with her tormentor and walled about by the dark.

He had his supper early, and he did not again invite Charlotte and Jerry to eat with him. Now, he felt, he should need all the solitude he could get to think out this thing he seemed to have taken upon himself, and keep a grip on his anxiety. After supper he asked Charlotte for blankets and a pillow. She did not look at him, but he was clearly aware that she was worried and would not let him read it in her eyes.

"It's all right, Charlotte," he assured her. "I just want some things up there at the hut, for the couch, that's all."

"You ain't goin' to sleep up there, be you?" she asked quietly. Charlotte, he knew, had felt his mood. She saw he was on edge.

"No," he said, "I shall be right back. Only I want to get them up there. To-morrow I shall be carrying books and things."

She got the blankets without a word, venturing only, as she gave them to him:

"Jerry'll be as mad as fire with me for not sendin' him up to lug 'em."

Raven smiled at her and went off with his load. He carried also his electric torch, and traversing the dark between the moving trees, creaking now and complaining, at the door of the hut he flashed on the light and lifted the stone. The key was there. That gave him a momentary relief. She had understood and done her part toward his

task of defending her. He went in, tossed the things over a chair, and lighted one of the candles on the mantel. The hearth was cold and he piled logs and kindling. Then he put the pillow in its place on the couch and spread the blankets. That was to show her she was to make herself comfortable. The match-box he placed on the mantel, where it seemed likely her hand would touch it, if she thought to feel there, and beside it his torch. It might be a momentary defence against the impalpable terrors of the night. But he was not sure she would feel any terrors, save of the defined and tangible. That he considered absorbedly as he went down the path after placing the key under the stone. It was not that she was insensitive. He felt in her the alert readiness of a perfectly acting nervous system. It showed itself in her self-control, her readiness of courage, her persistent calm. She would not thrill with apprehension over the tapping of those boughs against the walls: only at a voice or a human tread.

When he went in at his own door Charlotte appeared, with a quick step, from the kitchen. She was relieved, he saw. Dear Charlotte! she did not know how his anxieties were mounting, but she did feel the uneasiness he had brought with him. He tried to throw her off the track of her silent interrogations.

"I'm dog tired," he told her. "I believe I'll go to bed."

"That's right," said she. "Your fire's been blazed up quite a while."

"Don't you know," he called back to her from the stairs, "how we always sleep when we first come? I suppose it's the altitude."

"Yes," said Charlotte. "So 'tis, anyhow accordin' to Jerry."

Raven carried the look of her anxious, warm-colored

face with him. It was all motherly. Yet she had no children. Jerry lived under the daily chrism of that soft well-wishing. And there was the woman up the road, looking like a spiritual mother of men and strangely, mysteriously, also like the ancient lure that makes men mad, and she had to fight like a tigress for the mere life of her child. The contrast leaped into the kaleidoscopic disorder he saw now as life like a brilliant, bizarre fragment to make the whole scheme (if the scheme could be even estimated by mortal minds) more disorderly still. But he was tired and he slept. It would be good, he had thought for many weeks now, when he felt himself drifting off, to sleep forever. To-night he did not want that everlasting sleep. He wanted life, life to its full of power and probity, to stand between the woman and her terror. Suddenly he woke, and lay, his heart beating hard at the sound of the pines in the grove. Charlotte had done her best to put the breadth of the house between him and their lamenting, but their voices crept round the corner and into his open windows, and invaded his mind. He lay there, the wind on his face and that sighing melancholy of theirs calling him to an answering sadness of his own. And now it was not his inexplicable panic of disaffection toward the earth as God had made it, but a pageant of darkness where formless terrors moved, all hostile to the woman. At this moment, she seemed to him the point of blinding pain about which the general misery of the world revolved. She was beauty in the flesh. She led the mind to the desire of holy things. At least, that was where she had led his mind.

But the cruelty of creation was not content with setting her loose in the world of created things with the gift of beauty and holiness in her hand. It had veiled her

also with the mysterious magic that was simple enough and directly compelling enough to rouse the beast of jealousy, the beast of mastery, in the hearts of men. She did not seem to him an Aphrodite, bearing in her hand the cup of love. There was something childlike about her, something as virginal as in Nan. He could believe she would be endlessly pleased with simple things, that she could be made to laugh delightedly over the trivialities of daily life. But the hand of creation having made her, the brain of creation (that inexorable force bent only on perpetuation) saw she was too good a thing to be lost, too innocently persuasive to the passion of men. So it had thrown over her the veil of mystery and pronounced against her the ancient curse that she should be desired of many and yet too soft of her heart, too weak in her defenses, even to foresee the pitfalls that awaited her wandering feet and would sometime break her bones.

This was the worst of all the sleepless hours he had had, and in the morning he was up and out before Charlotte was ready for him. Jerry had breakfasted, when Raven came on him in the barn. He expected Tenney to go chopping, and he wanted the chores done, to get off early. Raven went in then and told Charlotte he would not have his own breakfast until Jerry had gone. He wanted to say a word to him as to the gray birches. But actually he could not down his impatience to know whether Tenney was coming at all. So he hung about and hindered Jerry with unnecessary talk for a half hour or so, and while they were standing in the yard together, looking down toward the river pasture, and Raven was specifying, with more emphasis than he felt, that a fringe of trees should be kept along the mowing, Tenney came. Jerry at once said he'd go in and get his dinner pail and Raven waited for

Tenney. This was not the man of yesterday. He carried his axe and dinner pail. He walked alertly, as if his mind were on his day's work, and the pale face had quite lost its livid excitement. It was grave and even sad. Raven, seeing that, wondered if the fellow could feel remorse, and was conscious of a lift in the cloud of his own anxiety. Tenney, not waiting to be addressed, walked straight up to him. He spoke, as soon as he was within hearing distance of a tone of ordinary volume, and what he said surprised Raven even more than the catamount calls of yesterday:

"Be you saved?"

Raven knew the salient country phrases, but, so alien was the question to his conception of the man, that he answered perplexedly:

"What do you mean by saved?"

Tenney set down his dinner pail, as if it hampered him, and began rhythmically, in the voice of the exhorter:

"Saved by the blood of the Lamb."

Raven stepped back a pace.

"No," he said coldly, "not that I'm aware of."

Tenney came forward a step and Raven again backed. There was something peculiarly distasteful in being exhorted by a fellow of unbridled temper and a bestial mind.

"You are a sinner," said Tenney. "If you reject the great atonement, you are lost. Don't you know you be?"

"No," said Raven. He was on the point of turning away, when he remembered it was an ill-judged impetuosity he could not afford. It was more important, in this world of persecution and unstable defense, to keep your antagonist busy, cutting gray birches.

"Do you reject Him?" Tenney, too, had his day's

work on his mind and he spoke rapidly, with a patent show of getting his exhortation done in time to fall into step with Jerry, appearing, at the moment, axe in hand. He picked up his dinner pail. "Do you reject Him?" he repeated, in his former singsong. "Do you reject Christ crucified?"

And in spite of the prudence his inner self had counseled, Raven found he was, perhaps only from force of habit augmented by his distaste for the man, answering truthfully:

"Yes," he said, "as you mean it, I do."

Jerry, in the road, had halted and was looking back inquiringly. Tenney started after him. Instead of being rebuffed by Raven's attitude, he seemed to be exhilarated. Raven concluded, as he saw the light of a perhaps fanatical zeal playing over his face, that the fellow took it for a challenge, an incentive to bring one more into the fold. It was something in the nature of a dare.

When he went in, Charlotte was about her tasks at the kitchen stove.

"You're not going to fodder the cattle, you know," he said to her, passing through. "I'll see to that. Jerry showed me the mow he is using from."

"I always do," said Charlotte, "when he's away all day. I admire to git out there an' smell the creatur's and hear 'em rattlin' round the stanchils till they see the hay afore 'em."

"Never mind," said Raven. "I'll do it to-day." Then a thought struck him. "I wonder," he said, "who Tenney leaves to do his chores."

"Why," said Charlotte, "I s'pose she does 'em, same's I do when I'm alone. 'Tain't no great of a job, 'specially if the hay's pitched round beforehand."

Raven, sitting down to his breakfast, thought it a good deal of a task for a woman made for soft, kind ways with children and the small domestic animals by the hearth. And then he did have the humor to laugh at himself a little. It showed how she had unconsciously beguiled him, how she had impressed him with her curious implication of belonging to things afar from this world of homespun usages. She was strong and undeniably homespun herself, in every word and look. Let her fodder the cattle. Perhaps they would add to the lonesome tranquillity of her day, with their needs and their sweet-breathed satisfactions.

XIII

For a week it was hard, clear weather, with a crystal sky and no wind. Tenney appeared in the early mornings and he and Jerry went off to their chopping. Raven's relief grew. By the last of the week he found his apprehension really lessening. Every hour of her safety gave him new reassurance, and he could even face the nights, the long hours when Tenney was at home. Tenney he took pains not to meet. He distinctly objected to being pressed into a corner by the revivalist cant of a man he could not wisely offend. Nor did he see her whom he called "the woman." Sometimes in the early dusk after Tenney had got home, he was strongly moved to walk past the house and see if their light looked cheerful, or if he could hear the sound of voices within. Smile at himself as he might, at the childishness of the fancy, he alternately thought of her as being pursued out of the house by a madman with an axe and exhorted to save herself by the blood of the Lamb. And, Tenney being what he was, the last was almost as disquieting as the actual torment. Every morning he went up to the hut to find no slightest sign of her having been there. If he stayed long enough to build a fire, he went back, after it had time to die, and laid another, so that she might light it without delay.

On the Saturday night of that week the wind veered into the east and the clouds banked up. The air had a grayness that meant snow. He had been up at the hut

all the afternoon. He had pulled out an old chest, the sea-chest of a long dead Raven who had been marked with sea longing, as it sometimes happens to those bred in the hills, and had run away and become mate and captain. Raven had always been vaguely proud of him, and so, perhaps, had other Ravens, for Old Crow, when he moved up here, had brought the sea-chest with him, and his own books also were stowed away in it. Old Captain Raven's were entirely consistent with his profession—charts, a wonderful flat volume full of the starry heavens and more enchanting to Raven than any modern astronomy; but Old Crow's, in their diverse character, seemed to have been gathered together as it happened, possibly as he came on them, in no sense an index of individual taste. There were poets (strange company they made for one another!) Milton, Ossian, Byron, Thompson, Herrick, and the Essays of Montaigne, the Confessions of Rousseau. Also, the Age of Reason, which, on the testimony of uncut leaves, had not been read. And there was a worn, dog-eared Bible. Raven had never wanted to appropriate the books so far as to set them with his own on the shelves. They seemed to him, through their isolation, to keep something of the identity of Old Crow. He believed Old Crow would like this. It was precious little earthly immortality the old chap had ever got beyond the local derision, and if Raven could please him by so small a thing, he would. He had them all out on chairs and sat on the floor beside the chest, looking them over idly until it began to grow dark and, realizing how early it was, he glanced up at the windows and saw the veil of a fine falling snow. He got up, left his books in disorder, and lighted the lamp. The fire had been dying down and he kicked the sticks apart. It must die wholly so that a

fresh one would run no chance of catching the coals. Yet it was unlikely she would come to-night. Tenney would be tired with his week's work.

And just as he was making himself reasons, in a mechanical way, while he put the room in order, there was a knock, quick, imperative, the door was thrown open and there she was. She was about to shut the door, but he ran before her. He did it and turned the key. Then he passed her and hurried to the fire and with both hands heaped on cones and kindling until it flared. While he did this she stood as still as a stone and when, having his fire, he turned to her, he saw she had nothing on her head and that the fine snow had drifted into the folds of her clothing and was melting on her hair. She looked more wildly disordered than when he had seen her before, for she had wrapped a blanket about her, and the child was under it, covered so closely that Raven wondered how he could breathe. He tried to take the blanket from her, but she held it desperately. It seemed as if, in unreasoning apprehension, she dared not let the child be seen. But he laid his hand on hers, saying, "Please!" authoritatively, and she let him unclasp the tense fingers, remove the blanket, and then take the child. Raven had had no experience with babies, but this one he took, in the heat of his compassion, with no doubt that he should know what to do with him. He felt the little feet and hands and, finding them warm, drew forward an arm-chair for her, and, when she sank into it, set the child in her lap.

"Put your feet to the fire," he said. "Your shoes are all snow. Better take them off."

She shook her head. She stretched her feet almost into the blaze and the steam rose from them. Raven went to

the cupboard at the side of the fireplace and took down a bottle of chartreuse. But she shook her head.

"I dassent," she said. "He'll smell it."

Raven came near breaking into an oath. Did the beast own her, that he should be able, after this new outrage, to get her sweet breath?

"I ain't cold," she assured him, "not now. No, I won't drink any"—for he was about to pour it for her—"I never took much stock in them things. I've seen too much of 'em."

Then Raven remembered that Charlotte had told him all the boys drank—her brothers—and he seemed to have turned another page in her piteous life. He set back the bottle and, to give her time to recover herself, resumed his task of straightening the room. At her voice, he was at once beside her.

"Should you just as soon," she asked quietly, as if the question were of no moment, "I'd stay up here all night?"

"Of course you're to stay all night." It seemed to him too beautiful a thing to have happened, to know she was here in safety with the trees and the snow. "I'll go down and get some milk and things for him"—he was indicating the baby who, under the ecstasy of warmth, was beginning to talk strange matters, standing on his mother's knee—"I'll tell Charlotte I'm staying up here all night."

But now he saw, in surprise (for he had failed to guess how his words would strike her) that she was terrified, perhaps more by him than she had been by Tenney.

"No," she cried violently. "You can't do that. You mustn't. If you stay, I've got to go."

"I can't have you up here in the woods alone," he reasoned.

She gave a little laugh. The quality of it was ironic.

It made him wonder what her laughter would be if she were allowed to savor the quaintness of sheer fun. She spoke obliquely, yet accounting for the laugh.

"What do you s'pose'd happen to me?"

"Nothing," he owned, comparing, as she meant him to, the safety of her state up here, surrounded by the trees and the wind, and her prison with the madman down below. "But I can't have it. Do you suppose I can go down there and sleep in my bed?" He paused and began to coax. Charlotte could have told her how beguiling he was when he coaxed. "I'll stay in the other room and keep an eye out. I sha'n't sleep. I won't even disturb you by tending the fire. You can do that. Come, is it a bargain. It's the only safe thing to do, you know. Suppose he should come up here in the night?"

"That's it," she said quietly. "S'pose he should? Do you want I should be found up here with a man, any man, even you?"

He was silent, struck by her bitter logic. His heart, in the actual physical state of it, ached for her. She would not let him save her, he thought despairingly; indeed, perhaps she could not. For she alone knew the noisome perils of her way. He relinquished his proposition, without comment, and he could see at once what relief that gave her.

"Very well," he said, "I'll go down. But I shall certainly come back and bring you some milk. Something to heat it in, too. Old Crow used to have dishes, but they're gone. Lock the door after me. I'll call when I come."

But she rose from her seat, put the baby on the couch and took the blanket from the chair where he had spread it. There were still drops on it, and she went to the other side of the room, at a safe distance from the baby, and

shook it. She had settled into a composure as determined as his own.

"It's no use talkin'," she said. "I've got to go back."

"Go back?" He stared at her.

"Yes. What we've just said shows me. Nothin's more likely than his comin' up here. He might reason it out. He knows I wouldn't go to any o' the neighbors, an' he'd know I wouldn't let baby ketch his death, a night like this, the storm an' all. An' if he found me here locked in, even if there wa'n't nobody here with me, I dunno what he'd do. Burn the house down, I guess, over my head."

The last she said absently. She was arranging the blanket about her with an anxious care, evidently making it so secure that she need not use her hands in holding. They would be given to the baby.

"Burn my house down, will he? Let him try it," said Raven, under his breath.

She looked at him in a calm-eyed reproach that was all motherly.

"We mustn't have no trouble," said she. "I dunno what I should do if I brought that on you."

"What does the man mean," Raven broke out, chiefly to attract her attention and keep her there under shelter, "by going dotty half the time and the other half butting in and asking people if they're saved?"

"Did he ask you?" she inquired. She nodded, as if it were precisely what might have been expected. "I s'pose he thinks he has to. He's a very religious man."

"Religious!" Raven muttered. "Does he have to do the other thing, too: go off his nut?"

She was looking at him gravely. Suddenly it came to him he must be more sympathetic in his attitude. He must not let her feel rebuffed, thinking he did not understand.

"I dunno's I blame him," she said slowly, as if she found it a wearingly difficult matter and meant to be entirely just. "You see he had provocation." The red came flooding into her cheeks. "He come home from work an' what should he see but the man, the one I told you——"

She stopped, and Raven supplied, in what he hoped was an unmoved manner:

"The one that looks up kinder droll?"

For his life he could not have helped repeating the words as she had given them to him. He had found them too poignant in their picturesque drama to be paraphrased or forgotten.

"Yes," she said eagerly. She was relieved to be helped. "He drove up in his sleigh, about fifteen minutes 'fore Isr'el come home. He come up to the house. I went to the door. 'What do you want?' I says. Then he begun to say things, foolish things same's he always did——"

She stumbled there, as if in shame, and Raven knew what kind of things they were: things about her eyes, her lips, insulting things to an honest wife, taunting things, perhaps, touching the past. More and more she seemed to him like a mother of sorrows, a child unjustly scourged into the dark mysteries of passion and pain.

"Never mind," he said reassuringly. "Don't try to tell me. Don't think of them."

But she would tell him. It seemed as if she had to justify herself.

"He told me he wanted to come in. 'You can't,' says I, 'not whilst I live.' An' he laughed an' stood there an' dug his heel into the snow an' waited, kinder watchin' the road till Isr'el hove in sight with his dinner pail. An' then I see it all. He'd drove along that way an' see Isr'el

an' Jerry comin' acrost from their work an' he meant to stan' there drivin' me out o' my senses till Isr'el see him. An' soon as he was sure Isr'el did see him, he turned an' run for the sleigh an' got in an' give the hoss a cut, an' he was off same's he meant to be."

"And you were left alone with Tenney," said Raven quietly. "There! don't tell me any more."

She smiled upon him, giving him an ineffable sense that she had, in telling him, somehow dropped her burden. Now she said, with as calm a resolution as that of the martyr marching to the fire he is sure his Lord has called him to:

"I'll go down along."

She went over to the couch, took up the child, and began to tuck about him the folds of her enveloping blanket. Raven moved to her side. He had an overwhelming sense of their being at one in the power of their resolution. If she would yield to his deliberate judgment! if only their resolutions could coincide!

"No," he said, "you're not going down there. I won't have it."

She looked at him and faintly smiled.

"I've got to," she said. "If I stay away all night an' he don't know where, there wouldn't be any way o' piecin' on."

And suddenly he knew, if she was to persist in "piecing on," she was right.

"Wait," he said. "Let me think."

There must be some way, he reflected, some means, by violence or diplomacy, to help her fulfill the outer rites of her bargain until he could persuade her to be taken beyond the reach of persecution. He wanted to fight for her; but if that was not the way, if his fists would only bruise her as well as Tenney, he was ready to lie. He had his

idea. It might be good, it might not, but it was an emergency idea.

"I'll go down," he said. "I'll go over to your house and offer to pay him for his week's work. You follow. Give me time enough to go into my house on the way and get some money. Then you come while I'm talking to him and I'll stay a bit, as long as I can. When you come, we can see how he is. If he's violent to you—if he looks it, even—you've got to come away."

"Oh, no," she cried sharply, "I can't do that. You must see I can't."

"I'll take you to my house," he said. "You know Charlotte. She'll be nice to you. Why, if Charlotte found out a thing like this was going on in the neighborhood, she'd go for him tooth and nail."

"No," said she, in a dull decision. "I can't. It would all come on you."

He understood. The madman would drag him into that range of jealous fury and because he was a man.

"I can look out for myself," he said roughly, "and you, too."

Again she shook her head.

"No," she said, "he might kill you. Anyways, he'd burn your barn."

"He won't kill me," said Raven, "and I don't care a hang about my barn. Let him burn. Good thing. I'll clap him into jail and you'll know where he is. Now!" He looked at the clock on the mantel. "I'm going. In just twenty minutes you start and come along as fast as you want to. I'll be at your house."

She had begun to speak, but he paid no attention. He turned up his collar and stepped out into the storm.

"Lock the door," he called back to her. "Keep it locked till you go."

The road down the slope was scarcely clogged at all. The firs, waving now and interlocking their branches in that vague joy or trouble of the winter wind, were keeping off the powdery drift. When he got to his house he saw Jerry on the way to the barn, but he did not hail him. Possibly Jerry had paid Tenney for his week, and although Raven's own diplomacy would stick at nothing, he preferred to act in good faith, possibly so that he might act the better. He smiled a little at that and wondered, in passing, if he were never to be allowed any arrogance of perfect behavior, if he had always got to be so sorry for the floating wisps of humanity that seemed to blow his way as to go darting about, out of his own straight course, to pluck them back to safety. There were serious disadvantages, he concluded, as he often had before, in owning a feminine vein of temperament. He went in at the front door and up the stairs, took a roll of money from his desk and ran down again. Charlotte had not seen him. She was singing in the kitchen in a fragmentary way she had when life went well with her, and the sound filled Raven with an unreasoning anger. Why should any woman, even so dear and all deserving as Charlotte, live and thrive in the warmth and light while that other creature, of as simply human cravings, battled her way along from cliff to cliff, with the sea of doom below, beating against the land that was so arid to her and waiting only to engulf her? That, he thought, was another count in his indictment against the way things were made.

The Tenney house, when he approached it, was cold in the darkness of the storm. The windows were inhospitably blank, and his heart fell with disappointment. He went up to the side door looking out on the pile of wood that was the monument to Tenney's rages, and knocked sharply. No one came. He knocked again, and suddenly

there was a clatter within, as if some one had overturned a chair, and steps came stumbling to the door. A voice came with them, Tenney's voice.

"That you?" he called.

He called it three times. Then he flung open the door and leaned out and, from his backward recoil, Raven knew he had hoped unreasonably to find his wife, knocking at her own door. Raven kicked his feet against the step, with an implication of being snow-clogged and cold.

"How are you?" he said. "Let me come in, won't you? It's going to be an awful night."

Tenney stepped back, let him enter, and closed the door behind him. They stood together in the darkness of the entry. Raven concluded he was not to be told which way to go.

"Smells warm in here," he said, taking a step to the doorway at the left. "This the kitchen?"

Tenney recovered herself.

"Walk in," he said. "I'll light up."

Raven, standing in the spacious kitchen, all a uniform darkness, it was so black outside, could hear the man breathe in great rasping gulps, as if he were recovering from past emotion or were still in its grasp. He had taken a lamp down from the high mantel and set it on the table. Now he was lighting it, and his hand shook. The lamp burning and bringing not only light but a multitude of shadows into the kitchen, he turned upon Raven.

"Well," he said, harshly. "Say it. Git it over."

Raven heard in his voice new signs of a tremendous, almost an hysterical excitement. It had got, he knew, to be quieted before she came.

"If you'll allow me," he said, "I'll sit down. I'm devilish cold."

"Don't swear," said Tenney, still in that sharp, exas-

perated voice, and Raven guessed he was nervously afraid, at such a crisis, of antagonizing the Most High.

The vision of his own grandmother came up before him, she who would not let him read a child's book in a thunder shower lest God should consider the act too trivial in the face of elemental threatening and strike him dead. He took one of the straight-backed chairs by the stove and leaned forward with an absorbed pretense of warming his chilled hands. But he was not reassuring Tenney. He was still more exasperating him.

"Say it, can't you?" the man cried to him piercingly. "Tell it an' git it over." Then, as Raven merely looked at him in a civil inquiry, "You've got suthin' to break, ain't ye? Break it an' leave me be."

Raven understood. The man's mind was on his wife, fled out into the storm. His inflamed imagination was picturing disaster for her. He was wild with apprehension. And it was well he should be wild. It was a pity she was likely to come so soon. Raven would have been glad to see his emotions run the whole scale from terror to remorse before she came, if come she would, to allay them.

"No," he said quietly, "I haven't anything to break. But it's going to be an awful night. I guess there will be things to break about the folks that are out in it."

Tenney came up to him and peered down at him in blank terror.

"Who's out in it?" he asked. "Who've you seen?"

Raven laughed jarringly. It did seem to him grimly amusing to be dallying thus with a man's fears. He was not used to playing games with the human creature's destiny. He had always looked too seriously on all such drama, perhaps because he had been so perplexed by drama of his own. If his life was too puzzling a thing

to be endured, was not all life, perhaps, equally puzzling and therefore too delicate a matter to be meddled with? But now the game was on, the game of sheer diplomacy. The straight and obvious path wouldn't do if he was to save a woman who handicapped him in advance by refusing to let herself be saved.

"The night?" he repeated. "Who's out in it? Why, I'm out in it myself; at least, I have been. But now I'm here by this stove, I don't know when you'll get rid of me. Put in a stick, won't you, Tenney? These big rooms have a way of cooling off before you know it."

Tenney did put in a stick and more. He crammed the stove with light stuff and opened draughts. Raven noted, in the keen way his mind had taken up, of snatching at each least bit of safety for the woman, that the tea kettle was boiling. She would be chilled. She would need hot water. And suddenly he felt the blood in his face. There was a hand at the latch of the side door. Tenney, too, heard it. He threw back into the box the stick of wood he had selected and made three strides to the entry. Again he called, in that voice of sharp anxiety:

"That you?"

She opened the door just before he could put out his hand to it, passed him without a look, and came in. He shut the door and followed her. Raven got up from his chair and stood, glancing at her with what he hoped was a casual attention. Tenney came back and, when she had thrown off the blanket, took it from her hand and dropped it on a chair. He was all trembling eagerness. That act, the relieving her of the blanket, was incredible to Raven. The man had wanted to kill her (or, at the least, to kill his child), and he was humbly inducting her into the comforts of her home. She had not looked toward Raven. With a decorum finer, he thought, than his own, she would

not play the game of diplomacy. She knew him and she could not deny him, even to save her life. Suddenly Tenney, brushing past to draw up a chair for her at the stove, became aware of him. Raven believed that, up to the moment, he had, to the man's absorbed gaze, been invisible. Now Tenney seemed to recognize the decencies toward even an unbidden guest.

"She's all beat out," he said, in uncouth apology. "It's my woman."

Raven turned to her, waiting for her cue. Would she take a hand at the game, as it imposed itself on him? Her silence and aloofness were his answer. She was sitting forward in her chair, to get the baby's feet nearer the warmth. But since she would not speak, Raven did.

"I should think any one would be beat out, a night like this," he said, as casually as he could manage, "carrying a baby, too, in such a storm. You'd better be careful of the child, at least," he added curtly, turning to Tenney, "if you want to keep him. Out in this cold and sleet! You don't want their deaths on your hands, do you?"

Tenney stared back at him in a wildness of apprehension.

"Be you a doctor?" he managed to ask.

Raven remembered the words: "Their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth." That seemed to be what Tenney's tongue was doing now.

"No," said he, "I'm not a doctor, but I've seen a good deal of sickness in the War. Get them warm," he added authoritatively, "both of them. Put the child into warm water."

"Yes," said Tenney, in an anguished sort of haste. Then to his wife he continued, in a humility Raven noted as her best guaranty of at least temporary safety, "I'll

bring you the foot tub, an' whilst you're doin' it, I'll warm the bed."

"Yes," she said quietly, but with a composure of mastery in her voice. "So do."

Raven got up and made his way to the door. Then he bethought himself that he had not given any reason for coming and that Tenney might remember it afterward and wonder.

"I thought I'd run up," he said, "and pay you for your week's work."

Tenney was darting about with a small tin tub, filling it from the kettle and trying the temperature with his hand.

"No," he answered absorbedly, "I can't bother with that to-night. Let it be till another time."

He had drawn a chair to his wife's side and set the tub on it, and now she also tried the temperature while he watched her anxiously. And at once the baby who, in his solemnity of silence, had seemed to Raven hitherto little more than a stage property, broke into a lusty yelling, and Tenney put out his hands to him, took him to his shoulder and began to walk the floor, while the woman poured more water into the tub. Neither of them had a look for Raven, and he went out into the blustering night with a picture etched so deeply on his brain that he knew it would always be there while he, in his flesh, survived: the old picture of the sacred three, behind the defenses of their common interests, the father, mother and the child.

XIV

All that night Raven, through his light sleep, had a consciousness of holding on to himself, refusing to think, refusing angrily to fear. The sleep seemed to him like a thin, slippery coating over gulfs unplumbed; it was insecure, yet it failed to let him down into blessed depths of oblivion below. But he would not think to no purpose (he had a dread of the wild, disordered clacking of the wheels in unproductive thought), and he would not invite again the strange humiliation, the relief tinged by aversion, that came over him when he felt, on leaving them, the inviolability of the three in their legal bond. She had looked to him so like heaven's own, he had upborne her in his thought almost to the gate of heaven itself; and yet she was walled in by a bond she would not repudiate with the brute who persecuted her. In spite of her uncouth speech, in spite of her ignorance of delicate usage, she seemed to him a creature infinitely removed from the rougher aspects of this New England life; yet there she was in one of the most sordid scenes of it, and she was absorbed by it, she fitted it as a Madonna fits a cave. And what business had he, he asked angrily, to weave about her the web of a glorifying sympathy, exalting her only from that pernicious habit of his of being sorry? Yet, as he thought it, he knew she was different from the ordinary country woman afraid of her man, and that any fine mantle he wove for her could not equal the radiance of her pure courage and undaunted truth.

Once he rose from his bed and began to dress hastily, with what he recognized at the same moment as the wild purpose of slipping out of the house and going up to Tenney's, to see if there was a light or to listen for the catamount voice. But that, he realized immediately, was folly. Suppose Tenney saw him. What reason could he plant in the man's inflamed mind, except one more hostile to her peace? So he went back to bed, chilled, and was savagely glad of his discomfort. It gave him something, however trivial, to think about besides the peril of a woman who looked like motherhood incarnate, and so should have been heir to all the worship and chivalry of men. With the first light he was up and had built his fire, and Charlotte, hearing him, got, sooner than was her wont, out of her warm bed. Charlotte owned to liking to "lay a spell" in winter, to make up for the early activities of summer mornings when you must be "up 'fore light" to keep pace with the day. For after nine o'clock "the day's 'most gone." She looked up at him as he came into the kitchen where she was brashing her fire for a quick oven, and he found her eyes clearly worried in their questioning.

"No toast, Charlotte," he said. He wondered if even his voice was trembling in his haste. "No biscuits. I'm going up to the hut."

Charlotte nodded and seemed to settle into understanding. She had a sympathetic, almost a reverent tolerance for the activities of pen and ink. To her, Raven was a well-beloved and in no wise a remarkable being until he stepped into the clouded room of literary activity. There she would have indulged him in any whim or unaccountable tyranny. Charlotte had never heard of temperament, but she believed in it. Once only did she speak to him while he was drinking his coffee:

"You got any ink up there?"

He started and looked at her a moment, dazed. Nothing was further from his mind than ink. Other liquids, tears, waters of lethe, lakes of fire and brimstone would not have sounded foreign to his thought. But ink! how incalculably far was the life of the written word from this raw anguish of reality he was caught in to-day! He recovered himself instantly.

"I've got my pen," he told her, "my stylograph."

And presently he had put on his coat, bidden her a hasty good-by and was plunging up the slope. Somehow, though the crest of the wave had been reached the night before and that usually, Tira had assured him, meant a following calm, he was certain of seeing her to-day. It was not that he wanted to see her, but an inner conviction, implacably fixed as the laws of nature that are at no point subject to the desires of man, told him she would come. The hut must be warm for her. The fire must be relaid. And, he told himself grimly, the apex had been reached. The end of the thing was before them. He must not yield to her again. He must command her, persuade and conquer her. She must let him send her away.

At the hut he almost expected to see her footprints in the light snow by the door. But the exquisite softness lay untouched. The day was a heaven of clearness, the shadows were deep blue and the trees beginning the slow waving motion of their majestic secrecies. He took out the key from under the stone, went in and made his fire with a hand too practiced to lose in efficacy from its haste. Presently it was roaring upward and, after a glance about to see that the room was not in any disorder too great for him to remedy quickly, he walked back and forth, and whenever it died down enough to let him, fed

the fire. It began to seem to him as if he were going to be there days feeding the fire to keep her warm, but it was only a little before ten when he heard a step and his heart choked him with its swelling of relief. At once he was also calmer. A moment ago even, he would have wondered how he could meet her, how keep the storm of entreaty out of his voice if he was to beg her to let him save her. But now he knew he should be himself as she had briefly known him and though he must command, he should in no sense offend. He stood still by the fire, half turning toward the door, to wait. It was an unformulated delicacy of his attitude toward her that she should not find him going forward to meet her as if she were a guest. She should enter as if the house were her own. But she did not enter. There was a hand at the door. It knocked. Then he called:

"Come in."

The door opened, under what seemed to him, in his first surprise, a halting hand and a woman stepped in. It was Nan. She came a hesitating pace into the room and stood looking at him, after the one interested glance about her, smiling a little, half quizzically, as if aware she had brought a surprise and yet not in doubt of its being welcome. Raven stared back at her for one bewildered minute and then, so instant and great was the revulsion, burst into a shout of laughter. Nan stood there and laughed with him.

"What is it, Rookie?" she asked, coming forward to him. "I'm funny, I suppose, but not so funny as all that. What's the joke?"

She was a finished sort of creature to come into his wood solitude, and yet an outdoor creature, too, with her gray fur cap and coat. She looked younger, less worn than when he saw her last, perhaps because her cheeks

were red from the frosty air and her eyes bright at finding him.

"Let me have your coat," he said. "Come to the fire."

She took off her coat and he dropped it on the couch. He pulled a chair nearer the hearth (it was his own chair, not Tira's), and motioned her to it. She did not sit. She put out her thickly shod foot to the blaze and then withdrew it, for she was all aglow from her plunge up the hill, and turned to him, her brows knitted, her eyes considering.

"What is it, Rookie?" she asked. "Something's up and you wish I hadn't come. That it?"

"I haven't had time to wish you hadn't come," he said. He had to be straight with her. "I never was more surprised in my life. You were the last person I expected to see."

"But why d'you laugh, Rookie?" she persisted, and then, as he hesitated, evidently considering exactly why he did and what form he could put it in, she concluded: "I know. You were taken aback. I've done the same thing myself, often. Well!" She seemed to dismiss it as unimportant and began where she had evidently meant to begin. "Now I'll tell you what I'm here for."

"Sit down, Nan," he bade her.

Now that his first derangement was over, he was glad to see her. Tira might not come. If she did, he could do something. He could even, at a pinch and with Tira's consent, put the knowledge of the tawdry business into Nan's hands. But she would not sit down. Plainly she had received a setback. She was refusing to accept his hospitality to any informal extent. And he saw he had hurt her. He was always reading the inner minds of people, and that was where his disastrous sympathy was

forever leading him: to that pernicious yielding, that living of other people's lives and not his own.

"It was only," he said, trying to pick up the lost thread of her confidence, "that I didn't expect you. I couldn't have dreamed of your coming. How did you come so early?"

"Took the early train," said Nan curtly.

"Not the beastly old thing that starts before light?"

She nodded.

"What for?"

"To get ahead of them," she answered, still curtly.

"Them? Who?"

"Dick and his mother and Doctor Brooke."

"Dick and Amelia? What's Amelia on here for?"

He had half expected her and yet, in the new turmoil about him, he had actually forgotten she might come.

"Because Dick sent her your letter. They both assume you've broken down, and she's called in an alienist to come up here and eye you over, and Dick's pretty sick over the whole business; so he's coming along, too. He was prepared for mother, I fancy, but not the alienist."

"But what's it all for?"

"Why, you know, Rookie. You've broken down."

Raven stared at her. Then he laughed.

"Well," he said, "let 'em come. Charlotte'll give 'em some dinner and they can look at the mountain and go back on the six to-night."

"That's precisely what they won't do," said Nan, her lips tightening. "At least your sister. She's going to stay."

"The deuce she is," said Raven. "What for?"

Then Nan did break out of the stiffness that seemed to have held her like an armor since the momentary set-

back of her coming. Her own laugh ran over her face and creased it into delighted merriment.

"Why, don't you see?" she asked him. "To brighten your life."

Raven's eyes met hers with a rueful terror. He reached, at a leap, the motive for her coming.

"And you rushed off up here to tell me," he said. "Dear Nan! Good child! But you don't mean they're actually coming to-day?"

"Of course I do," she said impatiently. "Didn't I tell you so? They were going to take the nine. They're well on the way. They'll get a pung or something at the station and be driving up to the house presently, and your sister'll give Charlotte the hamper of provisions she brought and tell her there'll be four to dinner. There'll be five, though. She didn't know that. She didn't hear about me. I s'pose you'll ask me to stay."

Raven put out his hand and stroked her sleeve. This was the first time she had seemed to him a woman grown. When she came back from school, those years ago, she had changed to girlhood. It was the girl always even when she came home from France with a world of hideous memories sealed away in her heart and brain. They had not, these memories, seemed so much as to scar her, she had obliterated them so carefully by the decorum of her desire to make the world no sadder by her knowledge. But now, at some call, the call of his personal extremity perhaps, she looked suddenly forceful and mature, as if her knowledge of life had escaped her restraining hand and burst out to the aid of a knowledge of him.

"I don't exactly know," he said, "what to do with them. I don't mind the alienist of course; but what do you suppose put it into her head—Amelia's—to bring him along?"

"Why," said Nan, "it's precisely the thing she would do. Don't you see? She does everything by rule, by theory, the most modern, most advanced. When Dick wrote her, she made up her mind like a shot. She had to put you in a pigeon hole. Shell shock, *cafard!* So the next thing was to set a specialist on the job. And there you are."

Raven grinned. The whole thing was more and more fantastic to him.

"I wonder how Dick likes the hornet's nest," he reflected, "now he's stirred it up."

"I can tell you," said Nan, a little white coming round her lips, as it did when she was excited, "how he liked me. He told me the whole business last night and I went for him. I told him he was a fool, a plain downright fool, and he'd seen his last of me till he got us out of the mess he'd got us into: you, me, and incidentally himself."

"It is mighty nice of you to come into it," said Raven.

"Well, how could I help it?" she asked impetuously, "when you're in? Why, Rookie, wouldn't you——"

There she stopped, and Raven answered the implication.

"You bet I would. What concerns you concerns me. But I'd no business to assume it's the other way about. That is, when it's Dick. You're bound, you know," he said, in a tentative way he thought he ought to venture and yet not quite sure of it, "to stand by Dick."

Nan turned a little, to look at him fully. She seemed to be angry now, and well it became her.

"Why am I?" she demanded. "Why am I bound to stand by Dick? I'm bound to nothing, with any man, Dick least of all, if he won't devote some of his surplus energy to growing up. So I've told him. He's got to grow up." But suddenly she seemed to recall herself to another question, put her personal anger aside and veered

to that. "Rookie," she said, "what about Aunt Anne's will?"

"Anne's will?" he repeated, staring at her. "Well, what about it?"

"You've had notice of it, haven't you?" she asked. "Official notice, that is?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "before I left town. Whitney went over the whole ground." But he said it as if it did not interest him to any degree. And yet, as she amazedly thought, it had, the last time she saw him, interested him to the exclusion of everything else.

"I thought I'd remind you," she said, "that it's been in the papers. You are Miss Anne Hamilton's residuary legatee. Dick knows it. So does your sister. She'll ask you things. I thought if you'd made up your mind to refuse it or, in short, anything about it, you'd want to be prepared for her. Those questions of hers—you can't evade them. They go to the bottom of your soul—and then some."

"Oh," said Raven dazedly, recalling himself to a complexity he had all but forgotten. "So they do. I dare say she will ask me. But I don't—Nan, to tell the truth, I haven't thought of it at all."

The inevitable comment sprung up in Nan's mind, as if his words had touched a spring, releasing it:

"What have you been thinking then?"

And as if in exact comment upon that, came a sound at the door, a knock, a hand on the latch and Tira stepped in. Nan turned sharply, and Raven had only to lift his eyes to see the picture his mind had painted for him. There she was, a little color in her cheeks from the air, her eyes heavy, as if she had not slept. She carried the child in his little white coat and cap, showing, Raven concluded, that she had not been forced to leave the house

in desperate haste. For an instant she confronted Nan; the life in her face seemed to go out and leave her haggard. Then, before Raven could take more than the one step forward to meet her, she had turned and shut the door behind her.

"Wait for me," he threw back over his shoulder at Nan and ran out.

XV

Tira was hurrying through the snowy track, ankle deep at every step. Raven, bareheaded, ran after. In a minute he had overtaken her.

"Stop!" he called, breathless, more from his emotion than from haste. "Stop! I tell you."

She did stop, and he came up with her. Now, at last, there were tears in her eyes, and he thought angrily that he had been the one to overthrow her control more absolutely than the danger she apprehended. He had, he thought, in this unreasoning anger, promised her asylum in the hut and she found it invaded. But curiously he did not think of Nan, who had come uninvited and scared the poor fugitive away. Nan, child and woman, was always negligible, too near him to be dealt with. But he had offered this woman the safety of a roof and walls, and she had fled out of it. At sight of his face, its contrite kindliness, her own set again into its determined composure. She seemed to see that she could not count on aid outside herself and returned again uncomplainingly to her old equilibrium of endurance.

"Come back," he said. "She's going down to the house with me. Besides, if she did stay, you'd like her. You'd love her. That's only Nan."

He said "Nan" of set purpose. It was the custom of this country folk, when they talked among themselves, to call all alike by their Christian names, even when they

scrupulously used the surname in direct address. He meant to reassure her. It was a way of bringing Nan into a friendly nearness.

"You've heard of her," he said, "Miss Hamilton's niece. She owns the next house to mine, the Hamilton house. She'll be here this summer. You'll be neighbors. Come back and speak to her."

"No," said Tira, in a gentle obstinacy. "I guess I'll be gittin' along toward——"

Here she stopped. She did not know what the direction or the end of her journey was to be.

"You're not going off the place," said Raven bluffly. "That's flat. The place is mine and you're safe on it. Do you want to go traipsing round the woods in this snow"—he fell purposely into the country habit of speech —"and get wet to your knees and have a cold?"

"I sha'n't have a cold," she said, smiling dimly at him and looking, as he realized, like a mother who was sorry her son could not have all he grasped at, but still remained immovable. "I don't hardly remember havin' one since I was little."

The child had resumed the rôle of Buddhistic calm temporarily abandoned last night when he screamed out his distaste for earthly complications, and Raven, glancing at the solemn blue eyes, saw that the only hope of moving her lay in him.

"Do you want," he shot at random, "to have the baby get chilled—and hungry?" There he broke off, though he saw that did move her. He had to know from what extremity she fled. "Has this been going on all night?" he asked.

"No," she said, with the same air of gently reassuring him. "I slept 'most all night. So did he, Mr. Tenney, I guess. An' we started out all right this mornin'. But

after he'd read the chapter an' prayed, it all come over him ag'in, an' I had to go."

"After he'd read his chapter," said Raven. "And prayed! God!"

The invocation sounded as if he also prayed.

"This time," she continued, "he—he seemed to have a realizin' sense."

She paused a perplexed moment. In the little she had said to Raven, he had noted from the first that she was often blocked by a difficulty in finding words she thought adequate. "He seemed to know what was comin'," she said. "He give me warnin'."

"Warning?"

"Yes. He come in an' he says to me, 'You don't want to go traipsin' round in this snow.' "

Raven noted the word and smiled slightly. He and Tenney were at one in their care for her.

" 'You go up chamber,' he says, 'an' have a fire in the air-tight an' turn the key. I dunno,' he says, 'what's goin' to happen, this day. I dunno.' "

"Why didn't you?" asked Raven.

"I didn't hardly dast to," she said, with her clear look at him. "I knew if he knew I's up there he never could stan' it till he—broke in the door."

Raven could only look at her.

"Besides," she said, "even if I be safer in the house, I don't feel so, somehow. I've always lived a good deal out door."

"So you came away," said Raven quietly. "You came here." The words really were, "You came to me," but he would not say them.

"I did lock the chamber door," she said, "jest as he said. But I locked it on the outside an' took away the key. I thought he'd think I was there an' it might keep

him out a spell, an' when he did git in, it'd give him a kind of a shock an' bring him to. It does," she added simply. "It always gives him a shock, not findin' me. He's asked me over 'n' over ag'in, when he come to, not to make way with myself, but I never'd answer. He's got it before him, an' that's about all there is in my favor, far as I can see."

The gentle monotony of her voice was maddening to Raven; it brought him such terrible things, like a wind carrying the seeds of some poisonous plant that, if they were allowed to spring up, would overrun the world of his hopes for her.

"You wouldn't promise him," he said thickly, "but you'll promise me. Promise me now. Whatever happens to you, you won't make way with yourself."

"Why, of course I sha'n't," she said, as if in some surprise that he should ask it. "How could I? Not while there's baby."

This threw him back to the sanity of their common cause. They were both to fight, he for her and she for the mother's one absorbing task: the child. He returned to his old grave way with her.

"Now," he said, "you're going to do exactly what I tell you. If you won't go back to the hut and see Nan, you're to stay here until I've got Nan and taken her down to the house. And we sha'n't come up here at all, unless I come to bring you something to eat."

"I don't want," she hesitated, "to put her out."

"Nan? You don't put her out. She only came because she didn't find me at the house. If you don't do precisely what I tell you, that'll be putting everybody out. I shall make an awful row. Do you hear me?"

She smiled, a little flicker of a smile. She might not like to be pursued by jealousy incarnate, but she was,

he saw, rather amused at being fraternally tyrannized over.

"Now," he said, "I'm going. You're to stand here in your tracks, and when I've sent Nan down the path I'll come and get you."

He gave her no time to object, but went back to the hut, and in to solitude and a deadening fire. He threw open the door of the other room, though Nan would surely not be there, and swore at not finding her. Womenfolk were giving him a good deal of trouble with their exits and their entrances. He mended the fire, snatched up his cap and gloves and went out again, up the path to Tira. She was standing motionless precisely, he thought, in the tracks where he had left her, and the Buddhistic child indifferently regarded him.

"Come on," Raven called to her, stopping at a pace from them. "She's on her way down along, and there's a good fire."

She started obediently after him and Raven, though he saw in her slowness the hesitating desire to express her distaste for putting any one out, paid no attention but went on ahead and opened the door.

"Keep up the fire," he bade her. "I'll be back along about one and bring you something to eat. The little chap, too. We mustn't forget him."

She had stepped inside and he was about closing the door; but she turned and seemed to recover her attitude of protest.

"No," she said, "don't you bring up anything. I shall be gone long 'fore then."

"Why, no, you won't," said Raven impatiently. "You're not going back into that——" he paused, seeking a word that should not offend her. She had clung to incredible loyalties. Perhaps she even clung to her home.

"Oh," she said earnestly, "it'll be over by then, an' he'll want his dinner."

Tenney would want his dinner! He had no words for that. He turned away. But she seemed to feel the finality of his going. Was he giving her up? She put the child down on the couch and turned to follow. Raven was just closing the door.

"Don't!" she cried. There was piercing entreaty in her voice. "Don't!"

It was really begging him not to give her up, and though he did not clearly understand it so, he knew he was forcing on her something to bear, in addition to all the rest. She must not think that of him. She must feel safe, in whatever manner it was easiest for her to accept safety. He smiled back at her in that way Anne Hamilton, when she had caught him smiling at Nan, thought so maddeningly beautiful. Poor Anne! She had starved for the sweetness of what seemed to her, in her hunger of the heart, an almost benedictory tenderness.

"Don't you worry," he said to Tira, in the phrasing he unconsciously adopted to her. "Everything's going to be exactly as you want it. Only," he added whimsically—a tone she had never heard in her life before—"if I could have my say for a few hours, it would be to find you here when I come back."

He closed the door and hurried down the path, moved even beyond his pity by the certainty that she was nearer him. She had accepted that strange community of interest between them. She had to be saved and he was to save her. Now it would be easier. He had no thought but to find Nan down at the house, but two-thirds of the way along the path he saw her, sitting on a slant of the great boulder and looking grave. She was not the Nan who had come to the hut, a half hour ago, so gaily cer-

tain of her welcome. The two women had shied at the sight of each other. He had cleared up the situation for the one, and now he had to do it for Nan. That was simple. He had never known her to fail in understanding. He came up to her and she raised her eyes, earnest now, startled, to his.

"Aren't you too cold there?" he asked.

She shook her head and smiled a little.

"No, not with my fur. I'm afraid the gray squirrels will see me. What would they think of skinning so many of their little brothers?"

"Nan," he said, "you saw her."

She nodded, slid off the rock and stood there, not looking at him. Of course she saw her, Nan's inner self was answering. Didn't they meet face to face? But she knew this was but his beginning and she would not challenge it. He plunged into the turmoil of Tira's affairs, foreign to him so short a time ago and yet his.

"She's the wife of the man who bought the old Frye place, next to yours. He's jealous of her, has fits of insane rage against her and she has to get out. One day I found her hiding up here in the woods. I told her, whenever she had to make tracks to come here to the hut, and build a fire and stay. I leave the key under the stone."

"Yes," said Nan. "I see."

"No, you don't," cried Raven, "or you wouldn't look like that. What is it you don't see? What is it you don't like? Out with it, Nan."

Nan said nothing, and suddenly he saw she was trembling. It was in her lips, it must be all over her, because he could see it in her hands, the tight shut ball of them under her long sleeves.

"Now," he said, irritated beyond measure by the

unkindness of circumstance, "what is it I haven't made clear? Don't you like her? Don't you believe in her? Or don't you take any stock in what I tell you?"

"Of course I believe you," said Nan quietly. He could see her relax. "As for liking her—well, she's beautiful. I agree with you perfectly there."

But he had not said she was beautiful. That he did not remember.

"She is, isn't she?" he agreed. "And so—Nan, she's the strangest creature you ever saw in your life. I suppose I could count up the words she's spoken to me. But the queer part of it is, I know they're all true. I know she's true. I'd stake——" there he paused.

"Yes," said Nan quietly. "I've no doubt she's true. And she's a very lucky woman."

"Lucky?" repeated Raven, staring. "She's the most unfortunate creature I ever saw. Lucky! what do you mean by that?"

"Well," said Nan, and now she spoke with an edge in her voice, "what's she going to do about it? She's in danger of her life, you say." He nodded absently, his mind going back to that word, lucky. "She's afraid of her husband, afraid he'll kill her."

"Not so much that as afraid he'll kill the child."

"Well, then, isn't she going to leave him?"

"No. She won't."

"Have you asked her?"

"Oh, yes," said Raven. "I asked her at once. I told her I'd send her away from here, find her something to do: just what anybody'd say in a case like that."

"And she wouldn't let you?"

"She wouldn't let me."

"Why not?" asked Nan. "Does she—love the brute?"

She might have flicked a lash across his face and his nerves winced under it. There was, she saw, in his mind, something disparaging to the woman in coupling her with a softness misplaced.

"I don't know," he said, with a thoughtful precision. "Sometimes I think she's all mother: doesn't care about anything but the child. I know she's square, knew it at once, but that doesn't mean I know any more about her. She's a locked door to me."

His tone was low, but it told Nan how he wished the door would open and let him in to persuade her to her own well-being. She looked at him a moment, as he stood staring down at his feet where a ragged wisp of yellowed brake came through the snow, looked as if he hurt her beyond endurance, and yet she had to probe ill circumstance to its depths. Then she spoke, but in her old voice of childlike gentleness toward him:

"I see. I really believe, Rookie, I do see."

He looked up at her in a palpable relief.

"That's a good girl," he said. Again she was half child to him. "You'll take a hand, too, won't you?"

That was more than she had bargained for. She would believe in the mysterious woman and leave him free to carry out any mission, however sophistical or chivalrous, he would. But she had not expected to enter the arena with him and defend the martyr thrown to the wild beast of marital savagery. Raven felt her recoil.

"I can't do anything for her," he pursued, with a discouragement she read. "Anything real, that is. I can give her the shelter of the hut, but he'll find that out some day and go crashing in. I can't be there always. Fact is, I can't be there at all."

"Yes," said Nan. "I see." There was in her voice a sweetness new to him. "I'll do anything you say,

Rookie, to make your mind easy. What do you want me to do. Take her away from here?"

He considered a moment. Yes, that was really what he did want. She had put the words into his mouth.

"But," said Nan practically, "what you've got to do now is to go down to the house and be tried for your life. Your sister'll be there something after two. And Dick. And the alienist."

Raven shrugged his shoulders as if he shook them free of a burden.

"I don't care anything about the alienist," he said. "Nor Dick. I do care a lot about Amelia. She's an awful bore. But it can't be helped. Come on down."

"You know," said Nan tentatively, as they took the road, "we could ask Charlotte for a luncheon and go off over the mountain. You've got snowshoes, haven't you?"

Raven shook his head.

"You can't foil Amelia," he said, "by running away from her. She'd camp for the winter. Or she'd get on our trail and follow us. No, we've got to see it through."

XVI

At the house they found Charlotte, in a silent alertness, making ready for the guests whom Nan, before going up to the hut, had announced to her. She was systematically refusing to be flurried, but Raven knew that Amelia, with her rigid conventions and perilous activity, was a disquieting guest. Remembering that, he took the incident with an ostentatious lightness, and Nan followed his lead. Presently Charlotte's kind face relaxed, and when they saw she was continuing her preparations with a less troubled brow, Raven took Nan upstairs to the great west room made ready for his sister with a fire roaringly active. There he installed her, and when she reminded him that the room had been wakened from its winter drowse to this exhilaration for Amelia, he bade her "hush up and stay put." Two facts were paramount: she was the first comer and this was the best room. But, Nan said, she wasn't going to stay over night. She should get the six o'clock back to Boston. Raven might here have reflected that, if she had merely the fact of Amelia's coming to break to him, she could have done it by telephone. Was there something in the unexpectedness of finding him immersed in the problem of Tira that had overthrown her preconceived plan? Had she, finding him absorbed in a new association, lost immediate interest in the drama she had mischievously meant to share?

"I take it for granted," she said, "you'll let Jerry carry me to the station."

"No," said Raven, impishly determined, "you're going to stay. You'll borrow nighties and things from Amelia."

"Seethe the kid in its mother's milk?" inquired Nan, her own impishness flashing up, irresistible. "Come up here to undermine her and then borrow her things?"

"Seethe the kid in its own tooth paste," said Raven. "Yes, you're simply going to stay. It's foreordained. Actually you came up here to help me out in more ways than one."

"Did I?" she asked, and reflected. She had one of her moments of clever guesswork over him. Rookie was a simple proposition. She could always, she had once boasted to him, find him out. And reaching about for the clue, suddenly she had it and proclaimed it in triumph.

"I've got it. Your farmer's wife! you want me to do something, something she won't let you do. It's what we said. You want me to take her back with me."

"Yes," he said. "Just that."

They stood looking at each other gravely in the silence of the gaily flowered room with the great blaze rushing up the chimney. It might have seemed that they were measuring each other. Yet they were inadequately matched, for though Raven knew Nan, it was not especially in her relation to him, and she knew herself and him intimately, in their common bond. The woman was the more intuitive, but the man was no less honest. She thought a moment now, her gaze unseeingly following the pattern of the rug at her feet.

"Very well," she said. "I'll go over to the house and get some things, and I'll stay."

There were, they both knew, bureau drawers full of Aunt Anne's things, doubtless in the perfect order that was a part of her exquisite mastery of life. She disliked traveling with a cumbersome outfit, even from the city to

this ancestral foothold. Everything possible was left behind her in each place.

"I'll go with you," said Raven. She should not poke into the cold house alone for the first time since she had inherited it, and encounter the desolation of change.

They went downstairs and out into the road, Charlotte looking from the window after them and wondering if they were bound on some jaunt that would leave her to encounter Mrs. Powell undefended. Nan's spirits always came up in the out-of-doors. She was a normal creature, needing to be quickened only by full air. She began to laugh.

"Rookie," she said, "I could tell you something funny."

"Fire away," said Raven.

"It's about my staying. I didn't bring any real things, because I knew I could come over here and get some, but my toothbrush is right here in my coat pocket. Don't you see, Rookie? I was going to stay if you made me, but not if you didn't, and you weren't to know I so much as thought of it."

"Humbug!" said Raven. "I might ha' knowed."

They came to the house, a great yellow square, well back from the road, and there being no path through the snow, Nan boasted of her boots and laughed at him for ordering her to wait until he went back for a shovel. So he strode ahead and broke a path and she followed, and he was not really concerned for her because she looked so fit; it seemed unlikely the natural conditions of nature would hurt her, however hostile. She opened the door with the key produced from her coat pocket and stepped into the great hall, darkened from the obscurity of the rooms on each side where shades had been drawn, and a winter coldness reigned. Nan gave herself no time to shiver over the chill of her homecoming, but ran up the stairs as if she expected to find the sun at the end, and

Raven stood in the hall, waiting, and the presence of Anne seemed suddenly beside him, and something he tried to think of as the winter cold (though it was far more penetrating and ethereal) struck him with a chill. Anne, the poignant memory of her, was certainly there with him as he stood absently following with his eyes the bridge-crossed road of the old landscape paper and thinking how different it used to look when the summer sunlight struck it through the open door; and Anne was beating, with her beautiful hands, at his unwilling heart, crying:

"Let me in! let me in to crowd Nan and that common woman out!"

Nan, coming down with a roll under her arm, glanced at him, perturbed. He had, she judged, been seeing ghosts. They went out and locked the door behind them (locking in, Nan silently hoped, the ghosts also), and hurried back along the road. And when they had gone into his house again, Raven told her to run upstairs and put her things in the west chamber.

"Scatter 'em all over the place," said he. "Amelia'll fight for that room. She'll fight tooth and nail. I sha'n't let her have it, not even if you give it up. Understand?"

"But what is she going to have?" Nan asked, from the stairs.

"She's going to sleep down here, back of the dining-room," said Raven perversely, "in the room they made over for Old Crow when they were going to get him to give up the hut and come down here to die. Amelia's scared out of her boots in the country, unless she hears voices on every side of her. I know Amelia. Cut along and come down again and help me set the scene."

They did set the scene, with an exhilaration that played back and forth between them like a heady atmosphere. Charlotte was bidden to make the bed in Old Crow's room

and while Raven built the fire, Nan helped Charlotte. And when the pung drove up from the station at the moment Nan had foreseen, she and Raven were sitting before the dining-room fire, apparently deep in talk. Whether Charlotte took her cue from them they did not know, but she was too busy in the back of the house to appear at once, and Mrs. Powell and Dick came in unheralded, turning first to the dining-room. There sat the two, absorbed. The visitors began, on an according note.

"John!" cried Amelia, and "Nan!" Dick cried, in an identical voice. Raven and Nan had the same effect of unison. They laughed, it was so exactly what they had known it would be, and Raven came forward, put his hands on his sister's shoulders, and gave her a little shake.

"Now, Milly," he said, "what the dickens are you up here for?"

Nan, having alienists on her mind, and finding none, was plumping her question at Dick:

"Where's Doctor Brooke?"

Dick evaded it by the self-evident statement that he hadn't come, and ended in a morass of frowning confusion.

Mrs. Powell turned to her with a surprised interrogation, a doubtful warmth. It tried subtly to convey an entire acceptance of her as an individual, combined with disapproval of finding her in the spot she had no excuse for seeking. And while they were exchanging civil commonplaces veiling unspoken implications, Raven was looking at his sister and thinking, in a whimsical terror, what a very large grain of sand she was likely to prove in the machinery of his daily life, and how little she had changed during his absence from America. Here she was, so indomitable in every particular that you could almost believe she was going to be as lasting as the processes that went to her equipment. She had, you learned to

know, tackled life as a servant to be governed, an enemy to be downed. If it had antidotes, she would lose no moment in equipping herself with them. If circumstance proved unfriendly, she would ignore it and forge ahead. She was, Raven had always recognized, the feminine replica of his father's special type. As to her looks, she was a thin, whip-like woman, who gave an impression of wiry endurance and serviceable resiliency. You would expect her to be hard to the touch, mental or moral, and yet she could double, evade, rebound. Put her in a hole, and she soon proved to you that its obscurity was the last place where she proposed to stay. She looked the latest thing evolved by the art of man. Her clothes were the prevailing fantastic creation, and yet, on her, they were not illogical. They were the plumage of an eccentric bird hatched to look that way. Her face, in its sandy monotone of color, fitted the art of her wonderful and yet not too noticeable hat, and her gloves and veil were the last word of style. Amelia had begun making herself, Raven used to think, long before God stopped making her. As a girl, she had gone after strange gods of culture and æstheticism, forsaking them, when they toppled, for newer gods still; but always she was undaunted, always persisting in her determined pose of governing the situation and her own attitude toward it. And Amelia, he knew, could hang on like grim death.

"But Nan!" she was exclaiming, "who'd have expected to find you here?"

"Well," said Nan, in the shock of realizing she hadn't quite remembered what Amelia was like, and ranging herself to fight on Rookie's side, "who'd have expected you, Mrs. Powell?"

Dick stood frowning at them impartially and twisting his hat in his hands like a sulky boy.

"Have you opened your house?" Amelia persisted. "You're not staying——"

"She's staying here," said Raven. "Nan's taken pity on me and come up for a visit. Oh, Charlotte! here you are. Show Mrs. Powell to her room, will you?"

Charlotte appearing, white-aproned, in the doorway, looking like the beneficent goddess of home, Mrs. Powell greeted her urbanely and asked appropriate questions. Was she well, as well as she looked? And how was her husband? Always well, she remembered. Yes, she would go to her room, please. But she'd go up by herself. She knew the way. She should think so, indeed! And her reminiscent laugh endowed them with the picture of the little girl she had been, born and brought up in this very house.

"Oh, but it isn't up," said Raven cheerfully. "It's the west bedroom."

"Not——" she began, and he nodded, taking her coat from the chair.

"Yes, Old Crow's room. What was going to be his if he hadn't given 'em the slip. I put Nan into the west chamber. You'll be awfully comfortable in that room, Milly. I'll take in your bag."

Amelia, immediately circumspect when she did not see her way, did follow him, but she was in as great a state of suppressed dudgeon as a civilized lady, living by the latest rules, allows herself to be. Dick and Nan, left alone in the dining-room, turned upon each other like two young furies.

"You came up here," said Dick, in a tone of ill-suppressed ire, "to tell him we were coming. I call it a mean trick."

"What about you?" inquired Nan. "You'd better not

talk about tricks. Can you think of a meaner one than giving him away to the entire middle west?"

"The middle west!" echoed Dick bitterly. "I told my mother."

"Yes, you told your mother. And she comes up here with her alienists."

"You'll notice," said Dick icily, "the alienist didn't come."

"I assume," said Nan, "he's expected on the next train. Or he's going to pounce some time when Rookie isn't prepared."

"You little beast!" said Dick. "You don't deserve it, but I'll inform you he isn't coming at all. I choked him off. I told him mother's the one that's dotty or she wouldn't have called him in, and Uncle Jack wasn't a patient and never'd consent if he knew. And he was an awfully decent fellow and said nothing would induce him to come."

"You did, did you?" said Nan ungratefully. "Well, you'd better. You've made enough mischief for one not very inventive young person, don't you think? And wouldn't it seem to you you'd better use your influence with your mother to-morrow morning and get out of here?"

"Out of here?" repeated Dick. "Out of my uncle's house. You act——" here he paused.

"Yes," said Nan, "I do act precisely that way. I act as if I had more right here than you. And I have. For I adore Rookie. And that gives me a right to stay with him and fight for him, and die for him, if I want to. And you don't care a sixpence, or you wouldn't have brought this on him."

Dick, the man, cooled sooner than she. He paled, and stood looking at her. Then he spoke in a voice dulled by wonder:

"I believe you do adore him."

"Of course I do," cried Nan, all her anger of impatience thrilling in her voice. "I love him more than anything in this world or the next and I always did and I always shall."

This Raven, coming back through the hall, heard.

"Good Lord!" he said to himself. "Good Lord!"

So these two, with all the forces of probability and beckoning fortune pushing them together, could not approach even within hailing distance. It was the hideous irony of a world bent on disorder. He walked in on them with a consciously grave aspect of recalling them to their more reasonable selves.

"What are you two scrapping for?" he inquired, and Nan looked at him humbly. She hated to have him bothered by inconsiderable persons like herself and Dick. "Don't you know you've got the universe in your fists for the last time you'll ever have it? You're young——"

There he stopped awkwardly in the enumeration of their presumable blessedness. It was Nan's face that stopped him. It had paled out into a gravity surprising to him: a weariness he had often expected to see on it after her work abroad, but had not yet found there.

"Yes," she said, in a tone that matched her tired face, "we're young enough, if that's all."

The talk displeased her. Nan never liked people to be dull and smudgy with disorderly moods. She kept a firm hand on her own emotions and perhaps she could not remember a time when they had got away from her under other eyes. Aunt Anne was partly responsible for that, and partly the proud shyness of her type.

"No, Rookie," she said, "we won't fight. Not here, anyway. Not in your house."

She held out a careless hand to Dick, who looked at it

an instant and then turned sulkily away. "Young cub!" Raven thought. He should have kissed it, even gone on his knees to do it, and placated her with a laughing extravagance. He recalled the words he had caught from her lips when he was coming in and flushed to his forehead over the ringing warmth of them. He bent to the fine hand about relaxing to withdrawal, after Dick's flouting, drew it to his own lips and kissed it: not as he would have had Dick do it but yet with all his heart. As he lifted his head he smiled into her eyes, and their look smote him. It was as if he had somehow hurt her.

"O Rookie!" she said, under her breath.

And at the instant, while they stood awkwardly in the rebound from emotions not recognized, Amelia came out from her bedroom, perfected as to hair and raiment, but obviously on edge and cheerfully determined on not showing it. Evidently she liked Old Crow's room no more than she might have guessed.

"O Lord!" said Raven ruefully to his inner self, "we're going to have a cheerful house-party, now ain't we?"

XVII

The afternoon went off moderately well. Nan forgot the late unpleasantness between her and Dick and assumed they were on their usual terms, a fashion of making up more exasperating to him than the quarrel itself. He was too often, he suspected, out of the picture of her immediate mind. But it was most unproductive to sulk. When she forgot and he reproached her for it, she forgot that also; and now when she suggested a walk he got his cap with a degree of cheerfulness and they went out, leaving Raven and his sister together by the fire, for what proved to be one of the rich afternoons of Raven's life. Amelia sat down at the hearth and put her perfectly shod feet to the blaze.

"Now, John," she said crisply, while he was fidgeting about, wondering whether he dared offer her a book and take himself out of doors, "sit down and tell me all about it."

Raven went to the fire, but stood commanding it and her. He might, he thought, as well meet the issue at once.

"What?" he asked. "What do you want to know?"

"You mustn't think I can't sympathize," she informed him, in the clear tone he recognized as the appropriate one for an advanced woman who sees a task before her—"damned meddlers," he was accustomed to call them in his sessions of silent thought—"you mustn't think I'm not

prepared. I've heard lectures on it, and since Dick sent me your letter I've read more or less."

"My letter!" groaned Raven. "If ever a chap was punished for a minute's drunkenness——"

"Drunkenness?" interrupted Amelia incisively.

"Oh, drunkenness of feeling—irresponsibility—don't you know? Didn't you ever hear of a chap's killing himself in a minute of acute discontent because he couldn't stand the blooming show an instant longer? Well, I didn't kill myself. I did something worse. I wrote a letter, and, by an evil chance, it was mailed, and Dick, like a fool, sent it on to you."

"Dick did absolutely right," said Dick's mother conclusively. "We won't discuss that. We'll go into the thing itself."

"What the deuce is the thing?" Raven inquired. "The letter, or my bursting into tears, like a high-strung maiden lady, and calling Dick in to be cried over?"

"Don't evade it," she charged him, with unabated gravity. "We mustn't, either of us. You know what I mean—*cafard*."

"*Cafard!*" Then he remembered Dick also had caught up the word, like a missile, and pelted him with it. He gulped. Ordinary speech wasn't going to be adequate. She belonged to this infernal age that lived by phrases. If he told her he was still of the opinion that the world was a disordered place of torment you could only exist in by ignoring its real complexion, she would merely consign him to a cell more scientifically padded, and stand gazing at him through the bars, in solemn sympathy. "So I've gone *cafard*," he said slowly, looking down at the fire and wondering how to answer a fool according to her folly. Or was she incredibly right? Had he some creeping sickness of the brain, the very nature of which implied

his own insensitiveness to it? "Or do you say 'got' *cafard?* And what's your personal impression of *cafard,* anyway?"

She had her answer ready. From the little bag in her lap she took out a small sheaf of folded papers, memorandum slips, they seemed to be, and whirled them over in capable fingers.

"It ought to be here," she said absorbedly. "Yes, here it is. No, it isn't either. It must be among my club notes. What Galsworthy says about it, you know. He makes it so clear. Just what they mean by it, the French, how you simply go to pieces. You know, John. Of course you know."

"Yes," said Raven drily, "I heard of it remotely among the boys."

"No wonder it happened to you. Really, you know, John, you ought not to have gone over there at all, not at your age. It was fine of you. I'm not denying that. But there were lots of things you could have done at home: dollar a year men and all that. However, we must take it as we find it. You've got *cafard,* and we must make sure you have the best thing done for you. Do you see?"

"And what," inquired Raven, curiously, "is the best thing?"

"My idea," she said, pelting on in her habitual manner of manipulation without much regard to the material she was working on, "would be for you to see an alienist."

"I thought," he was beginning mildly, and paused, with a sense of danger. He must, he saw, forego the fun of chaffing her from his awareness that the professional gentleman was to have been sprung on him to-day, and that he knew equally the infliction could only be deferred. But how, she would have questioned, did he get his news?

Not, he would have to convince her, through Nan. He amended his attack. "Why didn't you scare one up and bring him along?"

She frowned. Amelia was always restive under raillery.

"We needn't," she said, "go into that. I did hope to arrange it, but Dick upset things frightfully. He has behaved badly, very badly indeed. I hope now to persuade you to call in Doctor Brooke yourself. I should suppose he'd recommend your going into a sanitarium. However, we can't judge till we see what he says. Only, John"—and here she looked at him with some appearance of anxiety, as not knowing how he would take it—"you must give yourself into our hands."

"Whose hands?" asked Raven. "Yours? Dick's?"

"Oh, dear, no, not Dick's." Again she mentally champed her bit. Evidently Dick had exhausted her forbearance on the way up. "He's behaved like a——" Invention failed her. "I do wish," she ended plaintively, "the modern young man and woman had a vestige of respect left—only a vestige—for their elders. They're queerness itself. Now Nan! there's Nan. What's she posting off up here for and settling herself in your house" —in the west chamber, Raven's inner mind ironically supplied—"and acting as if you couldn't pry her out?"

"You can't," said Raven. "Nan's here and I'm going to keep her, all winter, if she doesn't get bored."

Amelia gave a little staccato shriek.

"All winter? I can't stay here all winter."

"Dear old Milly, no," said Raven, with the utmost gentleness. "I wouldn't have you for the world. It's Nan that's going to stay."

"Why," said Amelia, "it isn't decent. You're not an old man, John. Sometimes you don't even look middle-aged."

"You said I was," he reminded her. "You said I was so old I went and got *cafard*."

"Besides," said Amelia, clutching at her vanishing argument, "age has nothing to do with it. The older you are the more ridiculous they get over you, these romantic girls. And you'd cut in and take her away from Dick, right under his nose."

Raven suddenly tired of it.

"Amelia," he said, "don't be a fool. And don't say that sort of odious thing about Nan. I won't have it. Nan's a child."

"Oh, no," said Amelia, shaking her waved head with an air of doom. "Nan's no child. Don't make any mistake about that. She's no child."

At this, Raven found he was so unreasonably tired of her that he had to call himself to order and wonder if he really could be disgusted with Amelia, old Milly who was such a sophisticated fool and yet meant so well by everybody that you had to keep reproving yourself when you were tempted to consign her—elsewhere.

"Milly," he said, in the tone he always had toward her at her worst, a tone of recalling her, bidding her remember she was a nice ordinary woman, not an arbiter of social destinies, "Milly, sometimes you're an awful idiot. Don't you know you are? Don't you see it won't do to keep hitting me on the raw? I sha'n't stand it, you know. I shall have to take Nan under my arm and get out and leave you the house to yourself. It's all very well for you to call down alienists on me, and get me to put myself under restraint, but Nan's rather sacred to me. You can't meddle with Nan, and if you weren't so wrapped up in your own conceit, you'd see you couldn't."

Amelia seemed to be reflecting on something which resulted in shocking her into a further uneasiness.

"And the thing she said! I heard it with my own ears. She adored you! That's what she said, adored you. To Dick, too, of all people, Dick she's virtually engaged to."

Raven remembered a scene in a play where a drunken man lifts a chair and then, aware of his own possibilities, gently sets it down again. He wanted to lift a chair. Only he wanted to complete the act and smash it.

"Milly," he said gently, "I tell you Nan is a child. Doesn't that show she's a child—the pretty extravagance of it! Why, I'm 'old Rookie' to Nan. What else do you think I could possibly be?"

"Heaven knows," said Amelia, tightening her lips. "I can't imagine what her Aunt Anne would have said. John, wasn't it wonderful her leaving you practically all her money? And just what might have been expected. She was bound up in you."

"O Lord!" said Raven.

But Amelia, once started, knew no bounds.

"And that's what I say, John. If you take hold of yourself now and get into shape again, you've a great many years before you, and Anne's money with yours—well, I don't see why you shouldn't look forward to a great deal."

Raven went over to the window and sat down there staring at the black bare branches and the clear sky. It seemed to him unspeakably desolate and even, in its indifference to his own mood, cruel. So was Amelia, he thought. In spite of her platitudes about enjoying a great deal, she had him dead and buried. He became absurdly conscious that he was afraid, but of one thing only: to hear her voice again. Upon that, thinking how it would actually sound, he turned about and ignominiously left the room. And since there was no spot in the house where she might not follow him he took his hat and

jacket from the kitchen and went out through the shed. Charlotte was washing dishes at the sink, but she did not, according to her custom, look up to pass the time of day. A cloud rested even on her brown hair and splendid shoulders. Amelia had brought the cloud. She'd have to get out, even if he had to tell her so.

With no intention, but an involuntary desire to be where Amelia would not find him (and also, it was possible, where that other quietest of women could be found) he went down the road to the maples, and then plunged into the woods and up the hill. He had first gone along the road to mislead Amelia, if she chanced to be looking out. He couldn't have her following, and she was equal to it, pumps and all. Halfway up the hill, making his way through undergrowth where the snow packed heavily, he turned off at his left and so got into the wood road. And then, his breath coming quick from haste and the vexation of the clogged way, he did not slacken to cool off in the relief of easier going, but, breathless as he was, began to run, and got more breathless still. Tira was up there in the hut. He was sure of it. And for those first hurried minutes he forgot her presence there meant only added misery, but dwelt upon his own need of such a spirit as hers; the strength, the poise, the ready coolness.

At the door he felt rebuffed, it looked so inhospitable, so tight against him. He tapped and waited. No one came. Then he tried it and found it locked and the revulsion was bitter. He was about turning away when it came to him that at least he might go in. The key would be under the stone. He put his hand into the hollow and found it there, and only when he was setting it in the lock realized that this meant a deeper loneliness. It would be easier to think she was there, the key turned

against him, but still in his house, than to find the house itself void of her presence. He shook himself, in anger at the incomprehensible way the whole thing was moving him. Why should it move him? Then, finding it cold, the deserted room, he made himself busy and laid the fire and set the two chairs hospitably by the hearth. He did not light the fire. It must be ready for her if she came. After it was in order (her house, it seemed to him now, with a fatalism of belief he accepted and did not dwell upon) he sat down by the cold hearth and tried to think. But never of himself. He thought of her: beautiful, lustrous, caged bird with the door of her prison open, and who yet would not go. His mind went back to Milly, waiting there at home to apply scientific remedies to his diseased spirit, and he laughed a little, Milly seemed of such small consequence. But the thought of the misery of mind that had brought him here gave him a new sense of the cruelty of the world. For it had been the sad state of the whole world he had fled away from and here, as if all misery had converged to a point, he had taken a straight path to the direst tragedy of all: a mother trying against hope to save her child, the most beautiful of women pursued by sex cruelty, the gentlest threatened by brute force. How could he save her? He could not, for she would not be saved. He sat there until the dark in the corners crept toward him like fates, their mantles held up in shadowy hands, to smother him, and then suddenly remembering Nan and hospitable duties down below, he got up, chilled, went out, and locked the hut behind him. The house he found was a blaze of windows. Charlotte had lighted lamps and candles all over it. He was half amused by that, it gave such an air of fictitious gayety. He did not know Nan had whispered her to make it bright because he would see it, coming up the road.

The three were in the library by the fire. Amelia had dressed for supper in chiffon absurdly thin and curtailed, neck and hem, so that Dick had, without being told, brought her fur coat and put it about her shoulders. That was just like her, Raven thought, as he went in upon them, to go by the clock and, because winter evenings necessitated evening dress, ignore the creeping cold of a country house. Nan wore her gown of the morning, and her stout shoes. Indeed she had to, Raven reminded himself, when he was about to commend her for good taste. She had brought only her little bag. Nan was now sweet reasonableness itself. No sleepiest kitten, claws in-drawn, could have been softer. Amelia was baiting her, asking her, with a reproving implication that she ought not to have been in a position to know, about the life over seas, and Nan was answering by the card, compliantly, sincerely.

She had determined, Raven could see, that there should be no more ructions in his house. When he came in, they looked up at him, frankly pleased, and Amelia as patently relieved.

"I'm so glad you've come back," she said, getting up so that Dick could set another chair, and Raven join them in the conventional family circle. "I've been trying to send Dick out after you, but he wouldn't go. John, you mustn't get into the habit of wandering off alone like that. You really mustn't."

Raven grimaced as he took the properly adjusted chair, and wondered whether he'd got again to invite Milly to shut up. But Dick did it, in an honest despair that seemed entirely adequate.

"Ain't mother the limit?" he remarked, to no one but perhaps his own wondering mind.

Raven gave a little bark of laughter, and Amelia

betrayed no sign of having heard. But Raven caught the grateful tribute of Nan's tone.

"My hanky," she said, "Dickie, dear."

He saw it dropped, saw Dick dart for it, and Nan, accepting it, give his fingers a little squeeze. Evidently Dick, who flushed red, was being paid for having briefly illuminated mother. Supper was got through successfully, Raven and Dick doing active service. Raven talked about thinning out the lower woods and Dick played up beautifully, taking it with the greatest attention and answering at length. Mother was to be shunted imperceptibly from *cafard*. And when they had finished and returned again to the library fire, Nan, after perhaps half an hour of desultory talk, yawned rudely and asked if she might go to her bed. Raven suspected her. He noted how she half closed the library door behind her; so he took the chair she had lately left, commanding the crack of it. In about the time he expected, he heard her in the hall. She had come down the back stairs, he judged, and was now putting on her hat and coat, with scarcely a rustle, the sly one!

"Draught from this door?" he suggested, got up and closed it.

At least Dick shouldn't know she was going. If anybody stole behind her in the friendly "outdoors" it should be he, to guard her from her own foolhardiness. These roads were paths of peace, but Nan was equal to adventure more extended. She might have snatched snowshoes, in her stealthy preparation, to go off wood wandering. She might brave the darkness where, to country minds, lurked the recurring legend of the "lucivee." There was no actual danger, but Pan might be wandering.

"These old windows are draughty, too," said Raven. He paused at one of them, fumbling with the catch.

Really he was watching the path. There she was, at the left, going toward her own house. He pulled down the shade and lounged back to his seat by the fire.

"You probably feel the cold," said Milly drowsily. The fur coat and blazing logs were beginning to do their blessed work. "Your vitality is low."

"Yes," said Raven piously. He would have sworn to anything. "Just so." He went on talking to Dick, and Dick caught the ball neatly, so that presently they could glance at each other in a community of understanding. "She's off!" said Raven's face, and Dick's returned, "Right you are!" while he droned on about "popple," the local word for poplar, and the right month for peeling and whether it really paid to cut it if you had to hire. Raven loved Dick at times like these, when he was neither sulky over Nan's aloofness nor didactic about democracy and free verse. Amelia choked and came awake.

"Did I," she ventured, fearing a too frank reply, "did I—make a noise?"

"No, dear," said Raven mellifluously.

If Milly had been cleverer she would have remembered that when he was deceiving her he spoke, "as if butter wouldn't melt," as if his vocal arrangements dropped oil and balm.

"Dick and I are talking out this lumber question. Don't you bother. You don't know anything about popple."

Milly, reassured, dropped her cheek, with a little breath, and closed her eyes. "Gone?" Dick telegraphed Raven, who nodded "Gone!" took a step to the door, opened it, and was himself away. He snatched, haphazard, at a hat and coat on the great chest in the hall. Dick had a way of throwing things down and leaving them where they fell. Yes, they were Dick's, and Raven hastily

shoved himself into them, judging it was better, if Dick decided to go roaming, to keep him looking for them. Then he went out and down the path and along the road where Nan had gone. He came to her house and stopped, interrogating it. There was no light. Still she might be in the back part, hunting about for something she perversely couldn't wait for over night. He went up the path and tried the front door. It was fastened and he called to her. But there was no Nan, and he went back to the road and walked up and down, waiting. If she wanted a run alone in the dark, she must have it. After he had been pacing for what seemed to him a long time, he heard voices and the crunch of snow. One voice was hers, and he went on to meet it. The other, a man's, short-syllabled, replied at intervals. Nan seemed to be holding forth. They were coming on briskly, Nan and a tall figure at the other side of the road. She had seen Raven and called, clearly, though not with any implication of relief:

"That you, Rookie?"

He came up to them and saw, with a surprise out of all proportion to the event, in this neighborhood where anybody might join anybody else in familiar intercourse, that it was Tenney. They stopped, Tenney a step behind her. It looked as if he understood he had fulfilled his civility to her and could be dismissed.

"I've been calling on Mrs. Tenney," said Nan, "and I asked Mr. Tenney to walk home with me. Thank you, Mr. Tenney. Good night. Think it over, won't you?"

Tenney turned, without a word, and went back along the road, with his habitual look, Raven had time to note, in the one glance he cast after him, of being blown by a hurrying wind. Raven faced about with Nan and asked at once, in the excess of his curiosity:

"Now what are you up to, calling on the Tenneys?"

Nan answered seriously. There was trouble in her voice.

"Well, I got thinking about them so I knew I shouldn't go to sleep, and I just went up by, without any real plan, you know. The woman had such an effect on me. I couldn't keep away from her."

Raven was struck with the inevitableness of this. Yes, she had that effect. You couldn't keep away from her.

"I'd no idea of going in," said Nan. "And I did want a run. Isn't the air heady? But just as I got to the house, she opened the door. She was coming out, I suppose. She had the baby. The baby was all wrapped up. She wasn't, though. She had just an apron on her head. And when the door opened, I could hear him yelling inside. I don't know whether he was driving her out or whether she'd started to run for it."

"Well?" prompted Raven harshly. Why should she be so slow about it? "What then?"

"I went up the path," said Nan, in a half absent way, as if what she was telling seemed far less important than the perplexing issues it had bred in her. "I said good evening to her. I went by her: I think I did. I must have got into the kitchen first. And there he was. He's a striking fellow, isn't he, Rookie? Like a prophet out on the loose, foaming at the mouth and foretelling to beat the band. He'd got something in his hands. It was little and white; it might have been the baby's cap. He was tearing it to rags. You ought to have seen him at it."

"You shouldn't have gone in," said Raven angrily. "The fellow's dotty. Don't you know he is? Did he speak to you?"

Nan gave a little laugh. Suddenly the incongruity of it came over her.

"No," she said, "I spoke to him. Suddenly I seemed to see how Charlotte would have spoken—that mother way, you know, men can't stand up against. I said—I *think* I said—'Mr. Tenney, what under the sun are you carrying on like this for? I should think you were in liquor.'"

Raven, wondering if he should cry at the relief of having her safe out of the ogre's den, had to laugh with her.

"It caught him," said Nan, beginning to enjoy it, "as grandsir used to say, between wind and water. He looked down at the thing in his hands—the rags, you know—and dropped them into the wood-box. You see that was the real wiliness of the serpent, my telling him he was in drink. He's full of spiritual pride, all eat up with it. Then I played Charlotte some more. I told Mrs. Tenney to come in, and remarked that she'd get her death o' cold; and she did come in and her eyes—what eyes they are, Rookie!—they were big as bread and butter plates. I suspected she regarded me as specially sent. And I lit on him and told him, in good set terms, that if I knew of his driving his wife out of the house in one of his sprees, I'd have him hauled up and testify myself. Then I ordered him to get his hat and walk home with me."

"And he did!" cried Raven, in amazement at her. "Oh, yes, of course he did. Go on."

"Yes, he came to heel with a promptness that would have surprised you. And I didn't let up a minute. I discoursed all the way, on the whole duty of man."

"Did he answer?"

"Yes. That is, he spoke twice, the only times I'd let him. Once he broke in: 'I ain't a drinkin' man.' That rankled, you see."

"What did you say?"

"I said: 'Yes, you are, too. No decent man would act as you've been acting, unless he was drunk. And probably,' I said, 'you've been brewing it in the cellar, and selling it to the neighbors.' "

"That was a bliffer."

"It was. I had an idea he might drop dead in his tracks."

"That all he said?"

"Yes. Oh, no, there was one other thing. He asked me if I were saved."

"What did you say?"

"Told him not to be a fool."

Raven lifted up his voice and laughed.

They were opposite his own house, and Dick, who had just opened the front door, heard him.

"Oh," said Dick icily, when they came up to him. "So that's where you were. Uncle Jack"—for now he saw he had just cause for anger—"I'll thank you to let my hat alone."

"Yes, Dick," said Raven meekly. "But I saw it and it's such a dandy hat."

"Don't be rude to your only uncle," said Nan.

She was slipping off her coat and Raven judged, seeing her so calm, that her evening pleased her.

"Mother in there?" Raven inquired of Dick.

He had hung up the pilfered coat and hat, with great nicety of care, in the hall closet.

"No," said Dick. "She's gone to bed."

The implication was that she shouldn't have been allowed to get bored enough to go to bed.

"I'm going, too," said Nan. She gave her hand to Raven. " 'Night, Rookie." Then she apparently remembered Dick, and shook her head at him. "Silly!" she commented. "Nobody'll love you if you behave like that."

Dick did not answer. He turned about and went into the library, and Raven following, after he had seen Nan at the top of the stairs, found him reading a day-old paper with a studied absorption it was evident he was far from feeling.

XVIII

Dick tossed the paper aside and turned upon Raven who, taking his chair at the hearth, had bent to throw on a handful of light wood: the sticks that wake and change a room so completely that they might almost lighten the mood of the man their burning plays upon.

"Look here," said Dick, "you put the devil into Nan. What do you do it for?"

Raven looked up at him in a complete surprise.

"No, I don't. The devil? Nan's got less to do with the devil than anybody you and I ever saw. She's kept herself unspotted. She's a child."

This last he said of sudden intent for, having noted its effect on Milly, he wondered how it would strike Dick.

"Oh, no, she isn't," said Dick, with bitterness. "Unspotted—yes, of course she is. But Nan knows her way about. She can play fast and loose with the rest of 'em."

He stopped, conscious of talking too much, and ashamed of it. Raven remembered that quick interchange of ownership and repudiation between the two as they flashed back at each other in his library, those weeks ago, but he could not tell the boy Nan had kissed him out of her impetuous bounty only because the terrors of the time had lifted her beyond habit and because Dick's need was so great. She had put the draught of life to his lips, that was all. He remembered Monna Vanna going to the sacrificial tent, and his heart melted at the thought of

woman's wholesale giving even when the act is bound to recoil upon herself alone.

"You'd better not remind her of anything she said to you over there," he allowed himself to advise. "Things were pretty strenuous then, Dick, don't you remember? We've come back to a"—his voice failed him as he thought how base a time they had returned to—"a different sort of thing altogether. I'm an old fellow, according to you, but there's one thing I know. You won't get a girl by 'flying off the handle,' as Charlotte would say. Honest, old boy, when you have these fits of yours, you don't seem, according to the prophet of your generation, as impressive as usual."

"Who is the prophet of my generation?" put in Dick sourly, as if that were the issue between them.

"G. B. S., I've understood," said Raven mildly. "Don't I recall your telling me he was the greatest ever, at least since Aristophanes?"

"Oh, cut it," said Dick, whose gods were subject to change.

"Cut it by all means. But there is a thing or two I'd like your vote on. Your mother now: what's your impression of her plans about staying along here? Think she's game to tough it out as long as I do?"

"She'll stay as long as Nan does." Dick was frowning into the fire, and Raven doubted whether one of his admonitory words had sunk in. "I had an idea I could go back to town to-morrow morning and wire her I'd broken my leg or something. But Nan's got to go with me."

"Nan will do as she pleases," said Raven. He rose from his chair disgusted with young love so unpicturesque and cub-like. "Turn off the lights, will you, when you go?" And he went off to bed.

But in the morning, when he came down, Dick met him at the foot of the stairs. It was a changed Dick. His lip was trembling. Raven concerned, yet unable to deny himself a flippant inward comment, thought the boy looked as if he'd been saying his prayers.

"She's gone, Jack," said Dick.

In stress of intimacy, he often dropped the prefatory title.

"Gone?" Raven's mind flew to Tira. "Where?"

"Back to Boston. Walked to the station. Took the milk train. Charlotte says she simply walked out and said she wasn't coming back."

"Your mother or—you don't mean Nan?"

"Nan, yes. Do you see mother walking five miles to a train?" But if Dick was unsettled, this was not his surly mood of the night before. "If I drove her away"—he began, and then ended with an appealingness to be remembered of the Dick who had not been nettled by life, "Jack, I wish she wouldn't."

"I'll ask Charlotte," said Raven. "Your mother out yet? No? Well, don't bring her into it."

He went off to the kitchen where Charlotte was just setting little silver pots on a damask-covered tray. She glanced up at him, not absently, because Charlotte always seemed so charged with energy that she could turn from one task and give full attention to another.

"For Mrs. Powell," she explained, setting her hands to the tray, as if she expected him to make whatever remark he would without delaying her. "She's havin' her breakfast in bed."

"Dick tells me——" he began, and she nodded.

"Yes, she's gone. Nan, you was inquirin' about, wa'n't you? It's all right. I shouldn't ask any questions, if I was you: not yet anyways. I've got a kind of an idea

Dick'll be takin' the noon back to Boston. Maybe his mother, too. But there!"

This last was as if it were too much to hope for, and she lifted the tray and hurried away with it to Old Crow's room. Raven went thoughtfully back to the hall where Dick stood waiting, gnawing at his lip, and looking curiously like the Dick who had been a boy and come to Uncle Jack to have his fortunes mended as they affected kite or ball.

"Yes," said Raven, "she's gone. Don't take it that way, old man. Nan knows what's best for her."

"Walked to the station," said Dick bitterly. "Just plain cut stick and ran. Probably carried a bag. All because I made it so sickening for her she couldn't stay."

Raven thought of the things Nan had carried in the work of the last years—supplies, babies born on retreats. She had seen the fortunes of war. But there was no need of bracing Dick by telling him he could testify she hadn't any bag. If the boy could be melted into a passion of ruth over Nan, instead of a passion of resentment, so much the better for him.

"Come and have breakfast," he said. "Charlotte's bringing it in."

They went together, and when Dick had bolted his coffee and egg he said:

"Of course I've got to take the 11.03."

"Of course," said Raven. He knew if he were a young lover who had offended Nan and driven her away, that was what he should do: follow and humble himself before her. "Jerry'll drive you down."

So it happened that when Amelia, carefully dressed, came out of her room at noon, Dick had left without a word to her and her dignified resentment was only diverted by hearing Nan, too, had gone.

"John," said she, disposing herself by the fire, "I should like to know how you account for that girl?"

"For Nan?" said Raven absently. He was wishing Nan had found it easy to tell him she was going. "I don't account for Nan. I don't have to."

"So unexpected," said Amelia. "So absolutely impervious to everything we've brought them up to reverence. It's all of a piece. Depend upon it, no young girl could go over there and do the things she did and not feel the effects of it: for life, absolutely for life. You yourself feel the effects in one way, the young ones in another."

Raven was very considerate of her, left stranded there with him. But after the noon dinner, when they settled again by the fire, he began to realize the magnitude of his task. He was simply saddled with Amelia. She hadn't been able to get her alienist up here, but she had constituted herself a psychic detective on her own account. At first he didn't mind, she was so "simple honest" in her expedients. It was amusing, to a moderate degree, to evade them. How did he sleep? Did he dream? Did he know anything about the psychology of dreams? There was Freud.

"Yes," Raven interpolated. "Nasty fellow. Peeps and botanizes on his mother's grave."

Did the world still seem to him as hopeless as it did at the time of his writing the letter? That gave him an idea.

"Where is that letter?" he asked, cutting across the track of her calculated approaches. "What became of it?"

She did not evade him. She was too surprised.

"I gave it," she owned, "to one of our doctors at home. For a medical congress."

"The devil you did!" Raven permitted himself. "Milly, sometimes I think you advanced women—O Lord!"

"What else could I do?" Milly inquired, with her deliberate fair-mindedness, which was, he miserably knew, a part of her culture. "Surely, you wouldn't suppress evidence. And it won't be traced to you. You're simply Mr. X."

Raven was silent. He was thinking what a fool he had been to unpack his heart with words, and that if he told Milly so he should simply be unpacking it some more. He looked at the clear winter day occupying itself out there without him, and wondered why the deuce he couldn't put on snowshoes and tramp off his discontent leaving her to fight her boredom by the fire. She'd brought it on herself, hadn't she? Nobody wanted her to come. Was there some hidden force in women, their apparent vulnerability to the harsh world conditions that were bound to crush out even them in the end? They seemed so weak you had, in mercy, to reënforce them and then they proved so horribly strong, and used their strength against you, depleted as you were by fighting for them. Anyway, if he could get Milly's blood to moving and pump some of this hill air into her she, too, might be a more wholesome citizen of even an unfeeling earth.

"Want to go to walk, Milly?" he suggested seductively, and she looked at him pleasantly, grateful for the tone, at least.

"No," she said, "we're so cozy here."

Cozy! it might be cozy, if that meant being choked. But he thought he could stand a little more of it, and then he would at least drop asleep and snore. The indiscretions of the body were terrible to Amelia. And he did fall into a hopeless lethargy, and only about five o'clock, when the early dark had come, threw it off and got to his feet.

" 'Bye," he said. "I'll be back for supper."

Before she could answer, he was gone. Now he was afraid she might say, with an ill-timed acquiescence, that after all she would have a little walk, and he knew he simply couldn't stand it. By the fire, making an inexorable assault on his senses, the calm, steady beat of her futile talk could be borne. You bore it by listening through a dream. But out of doors, when the crisp air had waked you, you'd simply have to swear or run. He did run, snatching his hat as he went, up the road toward Tenney's. It was not a reasoned flight, but he did want to calm himself by the light burning through their windows, perhaps a glimpse of Tira moving about. The night was going to be clear and not too cold for pleasant lingering. Over beyond the rising slope opposite Nan's house he heard an owl hooting and, nearer, the barking of a fox. He turned that way and stood facing the dark slope. He knew what those trees were in spring, pink and light brown in the marshes at the foot of the rise, running up into a mist of sunshine with islands of evergreen. Then, turning to go on, he cast a glance at the house and stopped with a word of surprise. There was a light. Somebody had broken in (an incredible happening here) and was beguiled by loneliness and silence into an absurd security. He turned into the path and went softly up to the front door, lifted the latch and was stepping in when some one came. It was Nan. She was in the hall, a pile of blankets in her arms. Seeing him, she did not start, only laughed a little, all the mischief of her face running into it and waking it like the sun on moving water.

"Nan," said Raven, "Nan, my darling, why are you here?"

Nan did the incredible thing. She laid her pile of blankets in a chair, came back to him and deliberately

put arms over his shoulders and about his neck. Her face, beautifully sweet in its new flush, was close to his. It might well be flushed, for he had called her darling, and Nan, feeling lorn and bewildered in losing the Rookie she used to think she knew, felt for the instant that she had got home again. She had lost him, she felt, when she saw the shaken look he gave the strange beautiful woman up in the hut. Now here he was again, quite the same, only it was true that she had not seemed to be, for years, what he called her now.

"Rookie, my darling," said Nan, seeing no reason why she shouldn't give him the precious thing back again, "I'm terrible glad you've come. Charlotte tell you?" She put her cheek against his for a minute, took her arms away and turned into the west sitting-room where a fire was leaping and making soft, living shadows on the ceiling. In the middle of the room she stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Look at the shadows," she said, in a low voice, as if they might hear and flee away. "It's exactly as if they lived here all the time and waited for us to come back to them. Look at the ones behind those candlesticks. They've always been just like this, little old scholarly gentlemen in queer hats walking along a London street. I used to think they were going to old second-hand shops to buy old second-hand books. I wouldn't have those candlesticks moved by half an inch for fear the shadows would get mad and go with them. Sit down, Rookie, there where you used to read to me. I'll light up, so we can see each other."

He did sit down without waiting for her, on the little squat, old-fashioned sofa, and Nan went about the room with her match and dotted it with candles. Raven looked after her in her housewifely progress; he was still concerned, still grave over her leaving his house for this.

She had on her walking suit, whatever frills she might have discovered upstairs, and she looked ready for outdoor enterprise. What a hardy child she was, slender and supple, but taut for action in the homespun service of the day! She threw her match into the fire and came to him, sat down beside him and, like the Nan of a hundred years ago, her childhood and his youth, put her head down on his shoulder.

"Nan," said he, abandoning what he sometimes considered the heavy father attitude and jamming the silky head down into its hollow, "what did you do it for? Didn't you like my house?"

"Yes, Rookie darling," she said, in a tone of drowsy happiness. "I meant to stay—truly I did—and cut in when Mrs. Powell tried to get you to give yourself away so she could tell her alienists how crazy you are. But if I had, Dick would have stayed, too. He never'd have gone, never in the world. And he's so quarrelsome."

"How do you know he's gone?" Raven asked.

"Why, of course he has. He would, the minute he thought I had. Hasn't he?"

"Yes," said Raven, "he has. Nan, why the dickens do you treat him so? You mean to take him in the end."

"Do I?" asked Nan, still most contentedly. "Rookie, what a lot you know. Wake me if you hear a step."

"A step? Who's coming?"

"Charlotte. I told her I was no more afraid than up in your west chamber. Not so much: Dick and his mother can't pounce on me here. I didn't say that though. Charlotte thinks I just came over for a freak; but she's coming to stay with me."

"You don't know what Charlotte thinks," said Raven succinctly. "She's got a pretty accurate idea of all of us.

You're not going to stay here. That's flat. We'll blow out the candles in a minute or two and poke off home."

"This is home," said Nan and rubbed her cheek on his coat. "Darling Rookie!"

"You're running away from Milly," said Raven. "That's all right. I wish I could myself. But what are you going to say when she finds the house is open and you're here? I found it out and so can she. I was going by and saw the light."

"She won't go by and see the light," said Nan, from the same far distance. "Consider those pumps. She won't go out. If she does, you must just take her the other way. Head her off, Rookie, that's what you do, head her off."

"Do you know, Nan," said Raven, with a sudden resolution, "what Dick feels about you: I mean, what makes him so sore and ugly? He told me." (There was a slight disturbance on his shoulder. Nan seemed to be shaking her head.) "He apparently can't get at you. There's something in you that baffles him, puts him off. It makes him mad as thunder. You won't let him in, Nan. You don't let him see you as you are."

"Why, Rookie!" said Nan. She sat up straight and looked him in the face. Her eyes were beautifully calm. If her clinging to him was against the rules of this present life, nothing in her expression showed it. She was really like a child used to being loved and innocently demanding it. "Why, Rookie, Dick's not more than half grown up."

"He writes," said Raven obstinately, aware of having really no argument.

"What kinds of books? Conventional rot. Verse. Anybody could do it by the yard. No, you needn't look like that. 'Course I couldn't! But anybody that could

write at all. You could, Rookie, only you wouldn't have the face. You'd feel such a fool."

"Of course it's conventional," said Raven, "his poetry is. But that's natural enough. He belongs to the new school. You don't find him conventional himself, do you? Too conventional?"

"He's precisely like his mother," said Nan. She had the air of wanting to account for him, once for all, and sweep him out of the way. "Only she's conventional about waving her hair and uplift and belonging to societies, and he's conventional about brotherhood and a new world and being too broad-minded to be healthy. Don't you know there are crude things in a man that have got to stay there, if he is a man? War, now! if some beast goes out on a prowl (like Germany) the normal man doesn't call it a herd madness and quote the New Testament. He gets his gun. So did Dick get his gun, but now he thinks it's all over, he's too broad-minded to live. Oh, you can laugh, Rookie, but there is such a thing as being too superior to be decent, and that's Dick. The only time I come anywhere near liking him is when he forgets to call the world a fraternal sewing circle and comes out with a healthy damn. That's the streak of you in him. Don't you know the nicest thing about him is the streak of you?"

Raven was not aware of knowing that, but he had to own, though silently, that there was an exasperating three-quarters of Dick he himself could not, of late years, get along with. Was it youth? he wondered. Yet Nan was young. Who so sweetly sympathetic as Nan?

"Let's not talk about him," said she. "Yes, a minute more, though. I've sent off a letter to him. Charlotte was to give it to Jerry to mail on the train. It told him I shouldn't tell where I was, and I certainly shouldn't

come back till he got his mother away from here. He'd simply got to do it. I told him plainly."

"And then you're going back? You promised him?"

"I didn't promise him anything. Because, how could I? I don't know how things are coming out. There's the woman."

"What woman?"

He asked this in a perfect good faith.

"Mrs. Tenney." She withdrew from him slightly. If Tira made his heart race, she wouldn't hear it. He should not be spied upon. "Don't you know," said she clearly, "I've got to see this thing through?"

"See it through?" he repeated. "You can't. She won't let you. She won't let me."

"Of course she won't let you. If the man's mad with jealousy, he won't stand another man's supporting his wife."

"I should very much doubt if she let you. She's got a loyalty—well, it's the sort you read about when a brute breaks a woman and she says she fell and hurt herself. It's been the surprise of my life that she said a word to me."

"That's easy," said Nan. "You're so awfully sorry for everybody. They feel it in you. She thought you were an archangel."

"An archangel!" groaned Raven. "Good Lord! Well, what do you propose doing?"

"Go over there to-morrow. Ask her to come here and help me get the house in order.

"Then what? Talk to her? You'll frighten her."

But he knew Nan would frighten no one, not the least of the maimed and spent.

"No, but I thought maybe if things kept happening, I could take her back with me to town, to work."

"There's the child," suggested Raven.

"Yes, that's a drawback," she owned seriously. "On the other hand, it's an advantage. The child might be made the reason: to have somebody look at him, you know. I suppose you saw he isn't quite right."

"Not right? what do you mean? Deficient?"

"I don't know," said Nan. "That or something. Deaf, maybe. But not right. I hear something. It's Charlotte. Kiss me, Rookie. On my forehead"—he did it—"on my forehead, on my right cheek, on my left cheek, on my chin. No, that's all. That's good-night, Rookie—darling Rookie! It is Charlotte. I'll let her in."

She went to the door and opened it and Charlotte appeared, done up in an old-fashioned shawl and—Raven noted in an amused incredulity—a nondescript knitted thing, old-fashioned when he was a child.

"A cloud," he said to himself. "That's what they called the thing."

He felt absurdly thankful at seeing it again. It seemed to assure him that although the surface of life might heave and sink with revolution and the fate of dynasties, Charlotte and her equipment of bed-rock integrity and clouds existed still. She paused in the doorway to take a basket from Jerry, and closed the door on him, after a casual good-night. Raven went into the hall. The basket was generous, in its oval capacity, the contents covered with a napkin.

"Want this carried upstairs?" he asked, but Charlotte shook her head.

"No," she said. "It's for her breakfast. I shall be gone 'fore light." She lifted her sincere gaze to Raven. "I thought I'd come over," she added. "I shouldn't feel easy to have her here all alone. Jerry said he wanted I should."

Raven nodded at her and carried the basket off into the kitchen, and when he came back both women were upstairs and he heard the interchange of voices and their quick tread.

" 'Night, Rookie," Nan broke off her housewifely deeds to call, and he called back:

"Good night."

Then he went out and home again, and fulfilled his destiny for the day by another somnolent hour with Milly before the fire.

XIX

Nan and Charlotte, each in a front chamber, were soon cozily in warmed sheets. But when Nan judged Charlotte must be asleep, she got up, put more wood on the dying fire, slipped on her fur coat over a wrapper, did up her knees in a blanket and sat down by the window she had not yet opened, in anticipation of this hour of the silent night. Really she had lived for it, ever since she entered the hut and found the strange woman. The night at Raven's house had been as still as this, but there were invisible disturbances in the air; they riddled her chamber through and pierced her brain: what Amelia thought, what Dick thought. Here there was only the calm island of Charlotte's beneficence, and even that lay stiller than ever under the blanket of a tranquil sleep. She felt alone in a world that wasn't troubling itself about her, because it never troubled itself about anything.

The moon was just up above the fringe of trees at the east and shadows were black across the snow. She sat looking out with intentness as if she were there at the window for the sole purpose of watching the silent world, but really to get her mind in order for the next day and all the coming days. She felt about the heart the strange dropping we know as grief. No wonder the mortal creature, looking on at the commotions within the frail refuge of his body, should have evolved the age-old phrase that the heart bleeds. Nan's heart had been bleeding a long time. There used to be drops on each shock of her meet-

ing Raven after absence and finding herself put away from the old childish state of delighted possession. At first, she had believed this was one of the mysterious cruelties of Aunt Anne's inexorable delicacy of behavior; but when she grew older she had one day a great happy light of understanding, one of those floods that sweep over youth after washing at the barriers of its innocence. Rookie himself had put her away. It was one of the scrupulous things he had done for her, because she had been too ignorant to do them for herself. He had seen she was grown-up. It was true, Nan had to own, that this was one of the lines, drawn across her life, that pleased Aunt Anne most, because it removed her (or seemed to remove her) from Rookie. Aunt Anne was jealous to her finger-tips, the ends of those beautiful, delicately prisoning hands. Nan had tried never to acknowledge that. It always seemed such a barbarity to find in Aunt Anne the things that would have shocked her in herself.

To-night she looked it in the face. Aunt Anne was jealous. That was the first count. All her own life, too, Nan had been vaguely irritated by Raven's not marrying Aunt Anne. He was her property, wasn't he, in a queer way, never questioned, never, on his part, rebelled against? Yet it was a bondage. And if the real reason was that Aunt Anne wouldn't have him, why didn't he play the man and batter down her scruples, even that barrier of the years between them? But after that sudden look into Raven's eyes, the night she told him about the will, she had never been able to think of him as loving Aunt Anne at all. It was that horrible compassion of his, she believed, that obedience of the male to the weaker (and yet the stronger) principle of the demanding opposite. He had always been in bondage through his affections, first to his mother, then Aunt Anne, and then suddenly, terrify-

ingly, but most gloriously because this was the only wildly spontaneous thing of all, to the strange woman in the hut. He was innocent there, he was unthinking, he didn't know what tale his eyes told of him. It wasn't earthly passion they told. She had seen many things in her tumultuous life of the last few years, this woman he called a child. The eyes told how his soul was going down in a wreckage of worship of the charm that blooms in a few women only, translated to him through the pity of this woman's wretched state. Should she interpret him to himself? She could, without offending. Rookie was sensitive to see, and she found her hand steady to hold the torch. But there she saw herself slipping into Aunt Anne's mandatory attitude, choking, dominating, sapping him, heart and brain. It mustn't be done. It shouldn't. Rookie had had enough of spiritual government. Above all, she wanted him to have his life: not the sterile monotony of a man who renounced and served and deferred to managing females.

Had the woman any soul in her? If Rookie kidnaped her (and the child, it would have to be, the doubtful child) would she pay in love for love, or only an uncomprehending worship? One thing Nan had determined on, the minute she opened her door to him this night and saw the quick concern in his face and heard his tone in greeting: Rookie should feel there was somebody in this disordered world who plainly adored him. If he could believe that the better for her putting her cheek on his and loving him to death, he should have it. Rookie should feel warm. As for her, she was cold. She shivered there by the window and knew it was the inner tremor of her nerves, for the fire still leaped and the room was pulsing. "The amount of it is," said Nan to herself, "my heart's broken. Oh, hang Aunt Anne!" Then

she remembered Aunt Anne was dead. But she would not have recalled the little missile hurled at the impalpable ghost through the shade of removedness that enveloped her. Nan was inexorable in standing for what she saw.

In the morning she found the fires burning below stairs and her tray set out, with cup and plate. Charlotte had gone. Nan felt the mounting of spirit due a healthy body, with the new day, and made her toast and her coffee with a great sense of the pleasure of it all. There was one drawback. It was distinctly "no fair" to let Charlotte come over to companion her at night when there was so much to do with the exigent Amelia on board. But that must settle itself. If she could get Tira (whom she also called "the woman" in her thoughts) to run away with her to town, it could hardly be done too quickly. So immediately after her breakfast she put on coat and hat and went "over to Tenney's," as the country folk would put it. This was a day brightly blue, with mounting warmth, the road a smoothness of packed snow. When she reached the house, Tenney was just driving up to the side door in the sleigh, and she rejoiced. It made her errand easier. He was going to town, and she could see the woman alone. But immediately Tira, carrying the baby, a little white lump in coat and hood, came out and stepped into the sleigh. She, too, was going. Tenney waited while she settled herself and tucked the robe about her. He was not solicitous, Nan saw, but the typical country husband, soberly according her time to get herself and the child "well fixed." Nan, waiting, her eyes on them, still halted until they drove out, and nodded her good morning. Tenney drew up. His sharp eyes signaled her.

"I've got it in mind," he announced, "to have a prayer-

meetin', come Wednesday. I'm goin' to put up a notice in the post-office."

He turned a reminding look on Tira who responded by what seemed to Nan an unwilling confirmation:

"You're invited to come."

"You're all invited," said Tenney harshly, as if Tira had lagged in urgency. "All on ye."

"Thank you," said Nan, with a cheerful decisiveness. "I'll come."

Tenney slapped the reins and they went on, to a jingling of bells thinly melodious in the clear air, and Nan turned back to her house. How beautiful she was, the strange woman, she thought, with a renewal of her wonder over Tira, the calm majesty of her, the way she sat erect in the old red sleigh as if she were queen of a triumphal progress, the sad inscrutability of her wonderful eyes, the mouth with its evasive curves; how would an artist indicate them delicately enough so that you kept them in your memory as she saw herself doing, and were yet not able to say whether it was the indented corner or the full bow? She found herself remembering poetic lines about Grecian Helen, and then recalling herself to New England and the unlikelihood of such bewitchingness. There couldn't be a woman so compact of mystery and unconsidered aloofness, and yet beauty, beauty to the bone.

When the Tenneys drove by Raven's, each with face set forward, not looking at the house, Raven was in the kitchen consulting Charlotte about supplies. Jerry, also, was going to town, for, imperious even in her unspoken needs, Amelia would have to be delicately fed. Charlotte, hearing the bells, glanced absently at the window and Raven's eyes followed. He felt his heart give a little added start, of relief, he knew. At least Tenney wouldn't stop the horse and brain his wife on the road.

"There's the Tenneys," said Charlotte. "That's a queer kind of a woman, that wife he's got."

"Why is she?" Raven demanded.

Whatever Charlotte felt, he must pluck it out of her. It was sure to be true.

She spoke thoughtfully, as if reviewing what was not altogether clear in her own mind.

"I dunno's I know. But she's so kind o' quiet. Pleasant enough, but you al'ays feel as if she's a mile off."

Yes, Raven owned to himself, Charlotte was right. That was the way he felt, only it was not one mile but many miles off.

"That baby, too," said Charlotte, her brows knitted, as if the whole thing troubled her. "The baby ain't right."

Just what Nan said. What witchery women had!

"What's the matter with the baby?" he asked, and was nettled at the roughness of his voice.

Charlotte shook her head and seemed to shake off perplexed imaginings.

"I dunno," she said again. "But suthin' is. An' that's the queer part on't. You never'd know whether Mis' Tenney knows it or whether she don't. But there!" Then her mind settled to its task. "No, you couldn't git sweetbreads this time o' year, up here anyways. They don't kill."

Raven, after the consultation was over and Charlotte had explained the ease with which she could pack a hamper of hot dishes to carry over to Nan, "come one o'clock," went to his social task in the library where Amelia sat at the drowsy rite of warming her toes. He had a more or less relaxed feeling with Amelia now; she had shot her bolt and sprung her mine and could hardly have more in hiding. But she had, the completest shock

possible. She sat with her eyes fixed on the doorway, waiting, and her question was ready:

"John, what do you know about Uncle John? Great-uncle, of course I mean."

Raven advanced into the room and chose a seat by the window. Amelia, still thinly clad above and ineffectually baking herself, made him irrationally want to get away from fires.

"Old Crow?" he asked.

"Why, yes, if you want to call him that. I suppose that's what the country people did call him."

"Why," said Raven slowly, getting his recollections in order, prepared to give her what was good for her and no more, "I suppose there's no doubt he was an eccentric. He built the hut up there and moved into it and finally went over the countryside doctoring, in an unscientific way—and praying—and finally hauled in Billy Jones, a sort of old rake they thought of sending to the poor farm, and took care of him till he died. Billy was a tank. When we were little, there used to be stories we got hold of about the way Billy's legs swelled. One of the boys 'down along' told me he'd been up there and looked into the hut and Billy sat there in a chair with his legs bandaged and the water dripping through to the floor. We all wished our legs would drip. We thought it was great. Mother wouldn't let me go up there after old Billy went into residence. But we boys kept on hearing about him. I've no doubt we got most of the salient points."

He was giving her more than was good for her, after all. Amelia wouldn't like this. She didn't like it.

"Shocking!" she commented, shaking her head in repudiation.

"I've thought since," said Raven, partly in musing recollection and perhaps a little to show her what she

got by fishing for old memories, "Billy had cirrhosis of the liver. As I said, Billy was a tank."

"We needn't go into the question of Jones," said Amelia, with dignity. "He doesn't concern us. It was a perfectly unjustifiable thing for Uncle John to do, this taking him into his own house and nursing him. Perfectly. But it only shows how unbalanced Uncle John really was."

"Call him Old Crow, Milly," Raven interrupted her, resolved she should accept the picture as it was if she were bent on any picture at all. "Everybody knew him by that: just Old Crow. At first, I suppose it was the country way of trying to be funny over his name, as soon as he got funny to them with his queerness. And then, after he'd gone round nursing the sick and praying with the afflicted, they may have put real affection into it. You can't tell. You see, Milly, Old Crow was a practical Christian. From all I've heard, he was about the only one you and I've ever met."

"He was certainly not normal," said Amelia ingenuously, and while Raven sat rolling that over in his delighted mind and getting the full logic of it, she continued: "Do you know, John, he was a very commanding man, very handsome really? You look like him."

"Much obliged, Milly," said Raven. He was smiling broadly at her. His eyes—the crinkles about them multiplied—withdrew in a way that always made her uneasy, she was so unlikely, at such times, to guess what he was thinking about. In another instant he was to inform her. It all came over him, in a wave. He gasped under the force of it and then he roared with laughter. "By George, Milly," he cried, "I've got you. As the Scotch say (or are said to say) I hae it noo. Old Crow was dotty and my nose is like Old Crow's. So I'm dotty, too."

"I think," said Amelia, with dignity, "any specialist, if you could only be persuaded to put your case into his hands, would inquire very closely into family traits. And you and I, John, ought to help him by tabulating everything we can."

"Sure!" said Raven, relapsing into a vulgarism likely to set her teeth on edge and possibly, in the spasm of it, close them momentarily on reminiscence. "I'm willing to let you in for all I know about Old Crow. To tell the truth, I'm rather proud of him myself."

Charlotte was passing through the hall and Amelia called to her.

"Charlotte, a minute, please. You know our uncle, Mr. John Raven."

"Old Crow, Charlotte," Raven reminded her, seeing she needed prompting, not yet guessing where the question was to lead. Curiously, he thought, it was Milly's exasperating fate to put everybody on guard. But it was inevitable. When you had a meddler in the family, you never knew where you'd have to head her off.

"What," continued Amelia, "has become of Uncle John's books?"

"His books?" interrupted Raven, himself off the track now, "what the deuce do you want with Old Crow's books?"

"Where are they?" Amelia continued, now turning to him. "There's something somewhere—a book—I know it perfectly well—and we've got to have it. It came to me in the night?"

"What was it?" asked Raven. "Old Crow was rather a bookish chap, I fancy, in a conventional way. I've got some of his stuff up in the hut: rather academic, the kind daguerreotyped young men with high stocks used to study by one candle. What do you suspect—a will, or a love-

letter slipped in behind a cover and forgotten? It can't be a will. Old Crow didn't have anything to leave."

Amelia's hands trembled a little. A brighter rose had encircled the permanent red of her cheeks. She was, Raven saw with curiosity, much excited.

"There was certainly a book," she said, "a mottled blank book a third full of writing. It was a sort of journal. I was in the room when mother brought it from the hut and passed it to father to look at. He'd just come down from your room. You were ill, you know: diphtheria. Mother passed it to him without a word, the way people do when there are children in the room. He looked at it and then at her, and they nodded. I was little, you know, but I saw it was important, and I listened. And father said: 'No, it won't do to have it lying around. I'll carry it up attic and put it in the red chest.' That's what I mean, Charlotte," she continued, turning to Charlotte, who stood with a frown of concentration on her smooth forehead. "You know that old red chest, the one where uncle's book was put."

"Oh, yes," said Charlotte. "I know the old chest."

"Well," said Amelia conclusively, having made her point, "then you go up attic, will you, and open the chest, take out the blank book and bring it down."

"Nonsense!" said Raven. "Charlotte's got her hands full. I'll run up by and by."

Charlotte gave him a serious, perhaps a warning look, he remembered afterward, and went out of the room.

"You recall it, don't you," Amelia continued, "how you had diphtheria after Uncle John's death, and father had it next week."

"Yes," said Raven, tasting the unchanged bitterness of an old misery.

That had been one of the points where his life turned.

His father had taken the infection from him and nearly died, and the child he was then had never been able to escape a shuddering belief that he might have been guilty of his father's death. That had made him turn the more passionately to the task of lightening his mother's burden in the wild anxiety he had caused her. Poor little boy, he thought, poor little fool! Making his life a business of compensating somebody for something, and never, until these later years, even seeing the visible path his own feet should have taken. He forgot Amelia and showed himself so absent that she got huffy and fell into silence and only when he left the room did she remind him:

"Don't forget the journal. You'd better run up and look for it now."

He did go upstairs, really with an idea it might be best to run over the journal before Amelia pounced on it and turned it, in some manner, to his own undoing. At the head of the stairs stood Charlotte, waiting. One hand was under her apron. She stepped silently into his room, tacitly inviting him to follow, and brought out the hand and the mottled book.

"Here," she said. "Here 'tis. You lay it away safe some'r's. Don't seem to me I'd let anybody see it, if I's you, till you've been over it yourself."

Raven, with a nod of understanding, took the book, put it into his desk drawer and turned the key, and Charlotte hurried away to her kitchen. When he went downstairs again, he found Amelia at the open door. She was all an excitement of anticipation.

"Law, Milly," said he, in the country phrasing he loved to use to her when she was most securely on her high horse of the cultured life, "you look as nervous as a witch."

"Where is it?" said Amelia, beating a tattoo of impa-

tience, with one hand, on the door. "You've been up attic, haven't you?"

"Bless you, no," said Raven. "I can't go up attic now. I've got to do an errand for Charlotte." This was true. Nan's dinner had to be carried over. "You run up, there's a good girl. Give you something to do. No! no!" She was turning toward the kitchen. "Don't you go bothering Charlotte. I won't have it. Cut along."

And Amelia did, in a dignified haste, to show him how journals were found, and later, when the moment came, Raven went with his hot hamper to Nan's.

She met him at the door, no such overflowing Nan as last night, but serenely practical and quite settled into the accustomed comforts of her house.

"I'm as hungry as a bear," said she. "Come through to the kitchen. I eat in there. The only drawback to this, Rookie, is that it takes it out of Charlotte. Still, it won't last long, and I'll give her a kiss and a blue charmeuse. That would pay anybody for anything."

They unpacked the basket together, and Nan, her plate and knife and fork ready on a napkin, began to eat. Raven sat down at the other end of the table.

"I wish you'd stay," he said, watching her in her pretty haste. "I don't mean here: over with me. Come on, Nan. Amelia's settled down for good. She won't bother you—much. Anyhow, you can run off up to the hut."

Then he remembered what other fugitive she might find at the hut, and saw she, too, remembered. Her words came pat upon it.

"The Tenneys are going to have a prayer-meeting Wednesday night."

"A prayer-meeting!" He heard himself echoing it incredulously.

"Yes, and you're to take me, Rookie. Don't scowl. I've got to see that man when he worships his idols, and you've got to see him, too. His god must be an idol: burnt offerings, that sort of thing. Perhaps that's what he's doing it all for: offering her up, as a kind of sacrifice. His wife, I mean. What's her name, Rookie?"

"Thyatira," said Raven, and got up, his mind suddenly dense to the comfortable picture of Nan and her dinner, and went home.

XX

The next few days went by, all alike cloudless and uneventful within the house. Nan coaxed Charlotte into bringing her over meat and vegetables, and, with a plea of liking it, cooked them herself. Raven swung back and forth between the houses, but Nan found him silent and, she decided, cross. Every day he went up to the hut to see whether the fire had been lighted, and every day found the place in its chilly order. It seemed to him as if the whole tragic background against which Tira had been moving had been wiped away by some wide sweeping sponge of oblivion, as if he had dreamed the story or at least its importance in his own life, as if Nan had always been living alone in her house, and Amelia, tied up in Charlotte's aprons, her lips compressed in implacable resolution, always going through trunks in the attic, searching for a mottled book. He had no compunction over Amelia. Let her search, he thought, when Charlotte came to him with a worried brow and asked if he didn't think he could put it somewheres in sight, so's 't she should know 'twas no use. Do her good. If she didn't like it she could go back to her clubs and her eugenics and her Freudians. And when the evening of the prayer-meeting came he looked out at the brilliant weather, judged that the immediate region might seize upon it as an excuse for sleigh-riding, and was returning to his book for a brief minute more, when Amelia called from the window:

"Three sleighs! Where can they be going?"

"Oh," said Raven, without raising his eyes from the page, "sleighing, most likely."

But the minute she left the window, he put down his book, got his hat and coat from the hall, and went out through the kitchen where Charlotte was sponging bread.

"Going to the meeting?" he asked her.

"No," said Charlotte, absorbedly dissolving her yeast cake. "I never take much stock in——" There she paused, lest she might be uncharitably expansive, and found refuge in Jerry. "He says Isr'el Tenney ain't so much of a man, when all's said an' done, an' don't seem as if he could stan' seein' him on his knees. But there!"

Raven went on through the shed and up the road, to Nan's. She had seen him from the window and came down the path.

"Knew I'd come, did you?" he grumbled.

"Yes," said Nan. "We'd really better go."

Raven hated it all, out of his element as he was, going to spy on Tenney and hear him pray. What other reason was there? He and Nan simply wanted to search out the reactions in Tenney's spiritual insides in order to defeat him the more neatly.

The house was brightly lighted downstairs. Six or eight sleighs stood in the shelter of the long open shed at right angles to the barn. The horses had been taken in and blanketed. When Raven and Nan arrived, no one else was outside, and he was about to knock when Nan, who remembered the ways of neighborhood prayer-meetings, opened the door and stepped in. Men and women were seated in a couple of rows about the walls of the two front rooms, and Tenney stood in the square entry beside a table supplied with a hymn-book, a Bible, and a

lamp. He had the unfamiliar aspect of a man reduced to discomfort of mind by the strictures of a Sunday suit. His eyes were burning and his mouth compressed. What did they mean, that passion of the distended pupil, that line of tightened lip? Was it the excitement of leadership, the responsibility of being "in charge" of the solemn convention of prayer-meeting? It was the face, Nan thought, of one who knew the purposes of God from the first word of creation to the last, and meant to enforce them by every mastery known to man: persuasion, rage, and cruelty. She gave him a good evening and he jerked his head slightly in response. The occasion was evidently too far out of the common to admit of ordinary greetings. A man and woman just inside the doorway of the front room moved along, and signed Raven and Nan to take their vacated seats. As soon as they were settled Tenney began to "lead in prayer," and Raven, his mind straying from the words as negligible and only likely to increase his aversion to the man, sat studying the furnishings of the room, a typical one, like all the parlors of the region from the time of his boyhood to that of his father and Old Crow. There was the center table with the album and three red volumes of Keepsakes and Garlands, a green worsted mat, hopefully designed to imitate moss, and on the depression in its center the astral lamp. On the wall opposite were pictures of Tenney's father and mother, painful enlargements from stiff photographs, and on the neighboring wall a glazed framing of wax flowers and a hair wreath. The furniture was black walnut upholstered with horsehair. Tenney was of the more prosperous line of farmers. And yet he had not begun so. All this represented the pathetic ideal of one who toiled and saved and bought after the fashion of his type.

Raven's eyes strayed to the faces about him: these were the younger set, boys and girls from sixteen to twenty. The first two or three had, by chance perhaps, dropped into this room and the rest gravitated shyly to it. There was always a line of cleavage at prayer-meeting, as at teas and "socials," between old and young. Raven was glad he had chosen the room at random. He liked the atmosphere of half-awed, half-tittering youth. They were always on the verge, always ready to find hilarity in untoward circumstance, and yet trained to a respect for meeting, doing their conventional best. What hard red cheeks there were, what great brown hands of boys, awkwardly holding hats, and yet, taken into the open, how unerringly they gripped the tasks that fell to them. All of them, boys and girls alike, were staring at him and Nan: at Nan with a frank admiration, the girls perhaps with envy. At the corner of the room corresponding to his own, two chairs had been left vacant, and when his eyes came to them he saw a blue scarf depending from the back of one; it had been dropped when the occupant of the chair had left it. It was Tira's chair, and Tira herself appeared from the door opposite, leading from the kitchen, crossed the room, took the scarf and wrapped it about her shoulders and sat down. She had been called out, perhaps in response to a cry from the child who seemed to be the center of commotion in this house, though so mysteriously inactive. Raven felt the blood mounting to his face, she was so movingly beautiful in this scene of honest but unlovely mediocrity. Even her walk across the room, unconscious of herself, yet with the rhythmic step of high processionals—how strange a part she was of this New England picture! He could not see her now, without turning, and tried to summon his mind home from her, to fix

it on Tenney, who, having finished his prayer, was calling on one and another, with an unction that seemed merely a rejoicing tyranny, for testimony. It was a scene of tension. Church members were timid before the ordeal of experience or pleading, and the unconverted were strained to the verge of hysteria over a prospect of being haled into the open and prayed for. Neither Raven nor Nan knew how unpopular Tenney had become, because he could not enter the conventional limits of a prayer-meeting without turning it into something too tense, too exciting, the atmosphere of the revival. Yet, though his fellow Christians blamed him for it, they sought it like a drug. He played on their unwilling nerves and they ran to be played on. He was their opera, their jazz. Breath came faster and eyes shone. The likelihood of a hysterical giggle was imminent, and some couples, safely out of range of Tenney's gaze, were "holding hands" and mentally shuddering at their own temerity.

Now he was telling his own religious experience, with a mounting fervor ready to froth over into frenzy. Raven, turning slightly, regarded him with a cold dislike. This was the voice that had echoed through the woods that day when Tira stood, her baby in her arms, in what chill of fear Raven believed he knew. Tenney went on lashing himself into the ecstasy of his emotional debauch. His eyes glittered. He was happy, he asserted, because he had found salvation. His conversion was akin to that of Saul. To his immense spiritual egotism, Raven concluded, nothing short of a story colossally dramatic would serve. He had been a sinner, perhaps not as to works but faith. He had kept the commandments, all but one. Had he loved the Lord his God with all his heart, all his soul, all his might? No: for he had not accepted the sacrifice the

Lord God had prepared for him, of His only Son. That Son of God had been with him everywhere, in his down-sittings and his uprisings, as He was with every man and woman on earth. But, like other sinful men and women, he had not seen Him. He had not felt Him. But He was there. And one day he was hoeing in the field and a voice at his side asked: "Why persecutest thou me?" He looked up and saw—— Here he paused dramatically, though Raven concluded it was simply because he found himself at a loss to go on. He had appropriated the story, but he was superstitiously afraid to embroider it. For he (Raven gave him that credit) honestly believed in his self-evolved God.

"And then," said Tenney, in a broken voice, tears trickling down his cheeks, "the voice said to me: 'Go ye out and preach the gospel.'"

The front door opened and a little answering breeze flickered in the flame of the lamp. A girl near Nan, her nerves on edge, gave a cry. A man stepped in and closed the door behind him. He was a figure of fashion evolved from cheap models and flashy materials. Tall, quick in his movements, as if he found life a perpetual dance and self-consciously adapted himself to it, with mocking blue eyes, red hair and a long nose bent slightly to one side, he was, in every line and act, vulgar, and yet so arrogantly bent on pleasing that you unconsciously had to acknowledge his intention and refrain from turning your back on him. He looked at Tenney in a calculated good humor, nodded, had his great coat off with a quick gesture, and slung it over his arm. Then he stepped past Tenney, who stood petrified as if he saw the risen dead, and into the room. This was Eugene Martin. He seemed not to be in the least subdued to the accepted rules of prayer-

meeting, but nodded and smiled impartially, and, as if he had flashed that look about for the one niche waiting for him, stepped lightly over to Tira's corner and took the chair at her side. Raven, from the tragic change in Tenney's face, knew who he was and bent forward to see what Tira's eyes would tell. She was, it seemed, frozen into endurance. Martin, in seating himself, had given her a cordial good evening. She did not answer, nor did she look at him. Her pale lips did not move. Nor did she, on the other hand, withdraw from him. The chairs had been pushed close, and, as she sat upright, scarcely moving a muscle with her breath, the blue scarf touched his shoulder. Raven withdrew his gaze, not to make the moment in any sense conspicuous, and, feeling the silence, turned to Tenney to see if his leadership could surmount this base assault. The assault was premeditated. The gay insolence of the man's manner told him that. Tenney stood there silent, flaccid, a hand on the casing of the door. Every vestige of religious excitement had left his face. His overthrow was complete, and Raven, judging how Martin must rejoice, was for the moment almost as sorry for Tenney as for his wife. The little disturbance had lasted only a moment, but now all eyes were turning on Tenney, who had ceased to "lead." In another minute the eyes would be curious, the silence would be felt. As Raven wondered what would break the evil spell, Nan's voice came out clear, untinged by the prevailing somberness, warm with the confidence of youth:

"Can't we sing one of the nice old hymns? Coronation! That's got such a swing to it."

She began it, and the young voices broke in pell-mell after her like a joyous crowd, seeing a vine-clad procession, and losing no time in joining for fear of losing step.

Raven knew perfectly well the great old hymn was no matter for a passionately remorseful, sin-laden meeting of this sort. Nan knew it, too. He was sure she had not ventured it for the protection of Tira. No one had ever told Nan about the man with the devil in him who "looked up kinder droll." But she could see the tide of human emotion had better be turned to the glorification of God than to the abasement of man. Raven, in the swell of it, put his lips to her ear and whispered:

"I'm going to ask you to change your seat."

She gave no sign of having heard, but sang on, in a delightful volume, to "Crown Him Lord of all." The moment the last note died, Raven came to his feet. He addressed Tenney:

"One minute. There's a draught here by the door."

He went over to Martin, Nan following:

"Do you mind sitting by the door?" he asked the man. "There's a good deal of a draught."

Martin, his surprised look at Nan changing to a ready gallantry, got up at once.

"Anything," said he, "to oblige a lady."

Nan sat down and Raven and Martin took the seats by the door. There, too, Martin had advantage of a sort. He could stare down Tenney at short range, and this he did with a broad smile. Tenney, Raven concluded, was down and out. His comb was cut. Whatever passions might stir in him later—however, in reviewing the scene, he might rage over the disturber of his peace—now his spiritual leadership had passed from him and the prayer-meeting itself was quashed. An air of curiosity hung over it. Two or three of the older men and women in the other room offered testimony and one man, the old clock-mender from the other side of the mountain, who swore

with a free tongue about his secular affairs, but always wept when he went through the observance he called approaching the throne, knelt and prayed in a high voice through sobs. This lightened the atmosphere. No one ever regarded this performance seriously. He was the comic relief. On his Amen, Nan (blessed Nan! thought Raven) proposed:

"Let's sing again."

"No!" said Tenney. He had got back his self-assertiveness. Raven could guess his jealous anger, the tide of fury coming, flooding the stagnant marshes of his soul. "I want to hear one more testimony. Thyatira Tenney, get up and tell what God has done for you."

Tira gave a start so violent that the blue scarf fell from her shoulders and one end of it lay over Nan's arm. She did get up. She rose slowly and stood there looking straight before her, eyes wide and dark, her hands clasped. Her stiff lips moved. She did piteously, Raven saw, try to speak. But she could not manage it and after the long moment she sank back into her seat. Nan placed the blue scarf about her shoulders, carefully, as if the quiet concern of doing it might tell the woman something —that she was companioned, understood—and, one hand on the knot of Tira's clasped fingers, began to sing. She sang the Doxology, and after that, through unbreakable custom, the meeting was over and you had to go home. Men and women came to their feet, there were greetings and good nights and about Nan gathered a group of those who remembered her. But she kept her left hand on Tira's, and after the others had gone she said something quickly to the woman who stood, looking dead tired, uttering mechanical good nights. Martin, with a jovial good night to Tenney, had hurried off at once.

"See you later," he called back to him at the door, and Tenney looked after him with the livid concentration of a man who sends his curse forward to warn where it is not yet time for a blow. A laughing group followed Martin. There were girls who, horrified at the implications that hung about his name, were yet swayed by his dashing gallantry, and young men who sulkily held the girls back, swearing under their breath. Tira broke loose from Nan and went, fast as running water, through the room, to the back of the house. Raven made no pretense of saying good night to Tenney. He forgot it, forgot Tenney, save as an element of danger to be dealt with later. On the doorstep he stopped with Nan, in the seclusion of the moment while the others were bringing out horses and putting them into the sleighs.

"We can't leave her here with him," he said.

"What was the matter?" Nan returned as quickly. "What happened? That man?"

"Yes. The one he's jealous of. We can't leave her here."

"No use," said Nan. "She won't go. I asked her, told her I was living over at the house alone, wanted company. No use. She wouldn't go."

"She must go."

"She won't, I tell you. Then I asked if she'd let me stay over here and she said no. She said——"

"What?" urged Raven when she stopped.

"I almost can't tell, it's so pathetic. Just a word—three words: 'You don't know.' Then she stopped. Just that: 'You don't know.'"

Raven gave a little sound she could not bear, a breath, a curse—what was it? Anyway, the breaking impatience of a helpless man. He did not stir. He meant, she saw,

to stay there, doggedly stay, on the step, to await what happened. She put her hand through his arm.

"Come," she said authoritatively, "let's walk up the road and drop in again when they've all gone. It's no use staying now."

That, he saw, was wise, and they went out into the road, waited a moment for the sleighs just starting, and then walked away from home. Some of the people were singing "camp-meeting hymns," and there was one daring burst of "Good night, ladies," and a chorused laugh. Prayer-meeting at Tenney's was not, Raven concluded, regarded much more seriously than Charlotte had foreseen. The bells jingled off into the distance. The horses were bent on home. As if the sound only had torn up the night into shreds of commotion, so now the bits of silence drew together into a web and the web covered them. Nan, in spite of the perplexed question of Tira, could have settled under the web, there with Raven, as under wings. But he was hot with impatience. They had gone half a mile perhaps, when he stopped.

"Come back," he said. "I've got to know."

Nan turned with him and they went on in silence but very fast. Once or twice she was about asking him not to take such long steps, but she set her teeth and swung forward. In front of Tenney's they stopped. The rooms were lighted. The house was still. Raven drew a deep breath. What he had expected he did not know, whether calls for help or Tenney's voice of the woods shouting, "Hullo!" This, at any rate, was a reprieve.

"Come on," he said. "I'll take you home and then come back."

Again Nan stepped out in time. No use, she thought, to beg him to let her come, too. But she could come back.

Women were useful, she knew, with their implied terrors and fragility, in holding up certain sorts of horror. Nan was willing to fight, if need were, with all the weapons of her sex. In the road in front of her own house, was Charlotte, waiting for them. Nan left Raven, put a hand on Charlotte's arm, and called her "Ducky."

"You won't come in?" she said to Raven. "Don't you think you'd better. Half an hour or so?"

"Not a minute," said Raven. "Good night."

He left them and after a few striding steps was aware of Charlotte, calling him. She came up and spoke his name.

"I've just met that woman."

"What woman?" he asked impatiently.

"Tira Tenney. With the baby. This time o' night."

"Where?"

"Front o' the house, just as I come out."

"Then she was coming there," he burst forth. "Too bad! too bad! Didn't you know that? Didn't you ask her in?"

"Yes," said Charlotte, "I asked her in an' she said no, she was goin' down along. An' I stood an' watched her an' she turned off up the rise into the woods."

So it had begun, the terror, the flight. She was going to the hut and, for some reason, not the back way.

"There's somethin' 'tain't right," Charlotte was beginning, but he seized her wrist and held it. To keep her attention, or to feel the touch of something kindly and warm?

"Yes," he said, "something's wrong. Don't tell, Charlotte. Not a word—not to Nan or Jerry or—above all not to Tenney. I'll see to it."

He left her and hurried loping along the road, almost at a run, and Charlotte went in to Nan.

XXI

Raven passed his house and turned into the wood road. There he did not slacken, but took the rise at a great gait. He was at the hut a moment after Tira: she had had time for neither light nor fire.

"It's Raven," he called. She did not come, and he added: "I'm alone. Let me in."

Waiting there at the door, he had time to note the stillness of the woods, the creak of a branch now and then, and the half-drawn sigh from the breeze you hardly felt. At the instant of his beginning to wonder whether she might have fallen there from a hurt or whether she was even terrified of him, he heard the sound of the key and the door opened. He stepped in and her hand was at once on the key. She turned it and melted noiselessly into the dark of the room, and he followed her.

"No fire!" he reproached her, or perhaps himself, for it seemed, in the poignancy of his tenderness, as if he should have had it burning night and day. He set a match to the kindling and the flame answered it. She had taken one of the chairs at the hearth and he saw, in the leaping light, that she had put the child on the couch and covered him. She was shuddering all over, shaking horribly, even her lips, and he went into the bedroom, came back with a blanket and wrapped it about her. She held it close, in that humble way she had of trying to spare him trouble, indeed to make no confusion in the world she found so de-

ranged already. He remembered the chartreuse she had once refused and took it down from the high cupboard, poured a little and set the glass in her shaking hand, and, when the muscles did not answer, put it to her lips.

"It won't hurt you," he said. "Down it."

She drank, and the kindly fire of it warmed her. She looked up at him, and what she said was more unexpected than anything he could have imagined:

"Do you believe it?"

"Believe what?"

He could only guess she meant something connected with Tenney's madness of suspicion and the devil of a man.

"What he said." She was looking at him with intensity, as if life and death lay in his answer. "He said He was there to-night, there in the room. Do you believe that?"

"Who was there?" Raven prompted her, and the immediate reply staggered him.

"Jesus Christ."

He temporized.

"I've no doubt he believed it," he said, unwilling to speak Tenney's name. It was doubly hateful to him at the moment of her being so patently undone. He could only think she was trying to reconcile the ugly contrast between her husband's expressed faith and his insane action. "I'm sure he thought so."

"That ain't what I mean," she hesitated, and he began to see how her mind was striving in an anguish of interrogation. "What he thinks—that's neither here nor there. What I want to know is whether it's *so*. If there's Somebody"—she clasped her hands on her knees and looked up at him, mutely imploring him who was so wise in books and life to help her striving mind—"if there's Somebody

that cares—that died over it, He cared so much—if He's round here everywhere—if He sees it all—an' feels terrible, same as we do ourselves—why, then it's different."

"What's different?" Raven asked, out of his fog.

She was demanding something of him and he felt, in a sickness of despair, that it was something he couldn't give her because he hadn't it himself. Tenney could read her the alphabet of comfort, though he was piling on her those horrors of persecution that made her hungry for it.

"Why," she said, and the light and a bloom of something ineffable swept over her face, changing its tragic mystery from the somberness of the Fates to the imagined youthful glory of the angels, "if He's here all the time, if He's in the room when things happen to us, an' wishes He could stop it an' can't because"—again her mind labored and she saw she had come up against the mysterious negatives of destiny—"anyways, He would if He could—an' He knows how we feel inside when we feel the worst, an' cares, cares same as——" here she was inarticulate. But she turned for an instant toward the couch where the child lay, and her face was the mother face. She meant, he knew, as she cared for her child. "Why, then," she continued, "there wouldn't be anything to fret about, ever. You never'd be afraid, not if you was killed, you wouldn't. You'd know there was Somebody in the room."

This was the most deeply considered speech of her whole life. The last words, ingenuous as a child's unconscious betrayal, tore at him as, he suddenly thought, it would be if he saw a child tortured and in fear: as if he saw Nan. They told him how desperately lonesome and undefended she had felt.

"An' don't you see," she concluded, with the brightness of happy discovery, "even if you was killed, what

harm would it do you? He'd be waitin'. You'd go with Him. Wherever it is He lives, you'd go."

Raven turned abruptly, walked to a window and stood there looking into the dark. The challenge of her face was impossible to bear. Suppose she asked him again if he believed it? Did he believe in a God made man? By no means. He believed in one God, benevolent, he had once assumed, but in these latter years too well hidden behind His cloud for man to say. Did the old story of a miraculous birth and an atonement move him even to a desire to believe? It repelled him rather? What, to his honest apprehension, was the God made man? An exemplar, a light upon the path of duty, as others also had been. Had the world gone wrong, escaped from its mysterious Maker, and did it need to be redeemed by any such dramatic remedy? No, his God, the God who made, could not botch a job and be disconcerted at the continuing bad results of His handiwork. The only doubt about his God was whether He was in any degree benevolent. When he reflected that He had made a world full to the brim of its cup of bitterness, he sometimes, nowadays, thought not. All this swept through his mind in a race of thoughts that had run on that course before, and again he heard her and knew she was pulling him back to the actual issue as it touched herself.

"You tell me," she was calling him. Her voice insisted. He did not turn, but he knew her face insisted even more commandingly. "You know. There's nothin' you don't know. Is it true?"

Nothing he didn't know! The irony of that was so innocently piercing that he almost broke into a laugh. Nan was right then. Tira did regard him, if not as an archangel, as something scarcely less authoritative. He

turned and went back to the fire, threw on an armful of sticks, and stood looking into the blaze.

"What makes you say that?" he asked her. "What makes you think I know?"

"Why," said she, in a patent surprise, "'course you know. I've always heard about you, writin' books an' all. An' that's the kind you be, too. You're"—she paused to marshal her few words and ended in an awed tone—"you're that way, too. When folks are in trouble, you're so sorry it 'most kills you."

This was a blow staggering enough to hit his actual heart and stop it for a beat. What if he should say to her: "Yes, I do care. I care when you are hurt. I don't know about the God made man, but isn't my caring enough for you?"

Then bitter certainties cut in and told him it wouldn't do. She had learned her world lesson too terribly well. It would be only another case of man's pursuing, promising—what had they promised in the past? And after all, he thought recklessly, what did the private honor of his testifying yes or no amount to anyway? What moral conceit! To save his own impeccable soul by denying a woman the one consolation that would save her reason.

"Yes, Tira," he said quietly, and did not know he had used her name, "it's all true."

She gave a little sound, half sob, half ecstatic breath, and he saw she had not been sure he would yield her the bright jewel she had begged of him.

"True!" she said, in the low tone of an almost somnolently brooding calm. "All of it! Everywhere!"

"Yes," said Raven steadily, "everywhere."

"Over there where He was born, here!" That seemed

to amaze her to a glory of belief. "Why, if He's everywhere, He's here, too."

"Yes," said Raven. He loved his task now. He was putting her sorrows to sleep. "He's here, too."

At that moment, incredibly, it seemed to him that a difference pervaded the place, or at least that his eyes had been opened to a something unsuspected, dwelling in all things. Did he, his unchanged mind asked him, actually believe what he had not believed before? No, the inner core of him signaled back to his mind. His belief had not changed. Yet indubitably something had happened and happened blessedly, for it brought her peace. Tira gave a little laugh, a child's laugh of surprised content. He glanced at her. She was looking into the fire and the haggardness of her face had softened. It was even, under the warmth of the flames and her own inner delight, absorbed and dreamy. And Raven knew he must wake her, and, he hoped, without flawing the dream, to present action.

"Now," he said, "I want you to come with me down to Nan's"—still he dared not put her off a step from the intimacy of neighborly relations by presenting Nan more formally—"and spend the night there. In the morning, you'll go back to Boston with her. I shall enter a complaint against your husband."

It wasn't so hard to give Tenney the intimacy of that name, now she looked so sweetly calm. She started from her dream, glanced up at him and, to his renewed discomfort, broke into a little laugh. It was sheer amusement, loving raillery too, of him who could give her the priceless gift of a God made man and then ask her to forsake the arena where the beasts were harmless now because she no longer feared them.

"Why, bless your heart," she said, in a homespun fashion of address that might have been Charlotte's, "I wouldn't no more run away! An' if you should have him before the judge, I'd no more say a word ag'inst him! I wouldn't git you into any trouble either," she explained, in an anxious loyalty. "I'd say you was mistaken, that's all."

Something seemed to break in him.

"What do you mean?" he asked roughly. "What do you think you mean? I suppose you're in love with him?"

Tira looked at him patiently. She yielded to a little sigh.

"Why," she said, "that's where I belong. I don't," she continued hesitatingly, in her child's manner of explaining herself from her inadequate vocabulary, "I guess I don't think about them things much, not same as menfolks think. But there's one or two things I've got to look out for." Here she gave that quick significant glance at the little mound on the couch. "An' there ain't no way to do it less'n I stay right there in my tracks."

Raven, his hand gripping the mantel, rested his forehead on it and dark thoughts came upon him. They quickened his breath and brought the blood to his face and his aching eyes. It was all trouble, it seemed to him, trouble from the first minute of his finding her in the woods. She might draw some temporary comfort from his silent championship, in the momentary safety of this refuge he had given her. But he could by no means cut her knot of difficulty. She was as far from him as she had been the moment before he saw her. She was speaking.

"It ain't," she said, in a low voice, "it ain't that I don't keep in mind what you've done for me, what you're doin'

all the time. But I guess you don't see what you've done this night's the most of all. Now you've told me you know it's true"—here she was shy before the talk of godhead—"why, I know it's so, too. An' I sha'n't ever be afraid any more. I sha'n't ever feel alone."

"But Tira." he felt himself saying to her weakly, "I feel alone."

Did he actually say it, he wondered. No, for he lifted his face from his shielding hand and turned miserable eyes upon her, and her eyes met him clearly. Yet they were deeper, softer, moved by a sad compassion. There was something patiently maternal in them, as if she had found herself again before the old sad question of man's uncomprehended desires. She spoke, strangely he thought then, and afterward he wondered if she actually had said the thing at all.

"There's nothin' in the world I wouldn't do for you, not if 'twas anyways right. But——" and again she gave that fleeting glance of allegiance to the child.

He tried impatiently to pull himself together. She must see there was something hideous in his inability to make her safe, something stupid, also.

"Tira," he said, "you don't understand. Sometimes I think you don't realize what might happen to you. And it's silly to let it happen, foolish, ignorant. If some one told you there was a man outside your door and he wanted to kill you, you'd lock the door. Now there's a man inside your house, inside your room, that wants to kill you. Yes, he does," he insisted, answering the denial in her face, "when he's got one of his brain storms. Is there anything to pride yourself on in staying to be killed?"

She answered first with a smile, the sweet reassurance of a confident look.

"He won't," she said, "he won't try to kill me, or kill him"—she made a movement of the hand toward the couch —"no, not ever. You know why? I'm goin' to remind him Who's in the room."

"Why didn't you remind him this time?" Raven queried, pushed to the cynical logic of it. "You could have turned his own words against him. It wasn't an hour since he'd said it himself."

"Because," she answered, in a perfect good faith, "then I didn't know 'twas so."

"Didn't know 'twas so? Why didn't you?"

Her eyes were large with wonder.

"Because," she said, "then you hadn't told me."

Raven stared at her a full minute, realizing to the full the exact measure of his lie coming back to him.

"Tira," said he, "I believe you're not quite bright."

"No," said she simply, with no apparent feeling, "I guess I ain't. 'Most everybody's told me so, first or last."

It sobered him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean that. I'm off my head a little. I'm so worried, you see. I want to know you're safe. You're not safe. It isn't easy to accept that—to lie down under it."

Usually he had spoken to her in the homespun phrasing he instinctively used with his country neighbors, but the last words were subtly different to her, they were more distant, and she accepted them with a grave humility.

"Yes, sir," she said, and Raven awoke to the irritating knowledge that she was calling him "sir." He smiled at her and she realized that, as mysteriously as she had been pushed away, now she was taken back.

"So," he said, "you won't go down to Nan's and spend the night?"

She shook her head, watching him. Little as she meant to do what he told her, she wanted less to offend him.

"Then," said Raven, "you'll stay here. I'll bring in some more blankets, and you lie on the couch. You'll have to keep an eye on the fire. Don't let it go down entirely. It can get pretty cold."

He got up, lighted a candle and went into the bedroom for the blankets. Tira followed him and silently took the pair he gave her, came back to the couch and spread them carefully, not to waken the child. He followed with more and, while she finished arranging her couch, piled wood on the fire. For a moment he had an idea of announcing that he would stay and keep the fire up while she slept. But even if she submitted to that, she would be uneasy. And she was a hardy woman. It would not hurt her to come awake, as he knew she could, with the house-guarding instinct of the woman trained to serve.

"There," he said, beating the wood-dust from his hands, "now lock me out. Remember, you're not to go back there to-night. You owe that to me. You've given me bother enough."

But his eyes, when hers sought them timidly, were smiling at her. She laughed a little, happily. It was all right, then.

"You ain't mad," she said, half in shy assertion, following him to the door.

"No," he said gravely. "I'm not mad. I couldn't be, with you. I never shall be. Good night."

He opened the door, went out and waited an instant to hear the key click behind him and ran plunging down the snowy road. Once on the way he looked up at the mysterious stars visible in the line of sky above the track he

followed. Deeper and deeper it was, the mystery. He had given her a God to adore and keep her protecting company. He who did not believe had wrought her faith out of his unbelief. When he turned into the road, he thought he saw someone under the porch of his house and hurried, his mind alive to the chance of meeting Tenney, searching for her. The figure did not move and as he went up to the house a voice called to him. It was Amelia's.

"O John, is that you? I can't see how you can leave the house alone to go wandering off in the woods and never saying a word."

There she was in her fur coat, not so much frightened, he thought, as hurt. She was querulous with agitation.

"All right, Milly," he said, and put an arm through hers, "here I am. And the house isn't alone. Don't get so nervous. Next thing you know, you'll have to see a specialist."

"And Charlotte's gone," she lamented sharply, allowing him to march her in and turning, in the warm hall, to confront him. "Here I've been all alone."

"Where's Jerry?"

Raven had thrown off his hat and coat and frankly owned himself tired.

"In the kitchen. But he won't tell where Charlotte is. He says she's gone up along."

"Well, so she has, to a neighbor's. Come into the library and get 'het' through before you go to bed."

"And," she lamented, letting him give her a kindly push toward the door, "I've got to pack, myself, if Charlotte doesn't come."

"Pack?" He stared at her. "You're not leaving?"

"Yes, John." She said it portentously, as bidding him

remember he might be sorry when she was no more. "I'm going. Dick has telegraphed."

"Anything the matter?"

"That's it. I don't know. If I did, I could decide. He orders me, simply orders me, to take the early train. What do you make of it?"

Raven considered. Actually, he thought, Dick was carrying out his benevolent plan of getting her back, by hook or crook.

"I don't believe I'd worry, Milly," he said, gravely, "but I think you'd better go."

"Yes," she said, "that's it. I don't dare not to. Something may be the matter. I've tried to telephone, but he doesn't answer. I must go."

XXII

Raven always remembered that as the night of his life, up to this present moment, the mountain peak standing above the waters of his discontent. The top of the mountain, that was what lifted itself in an island inexpressibly green and fair above those sullen depths, and on this, the island of deliverance, he was to stand. After he had reasoned Amelia into her room and persuaded her to leave her packing till the morning, he went up to his own chamber, mentally spent and yet keyed to an exhausting pitch. He was excited yet tired, tied up into nervous knots without the will to loose them. What sense in going to bed, when he could not sleep? What need of reviewing the last chapter of his knowledge of the woman who was so compelling in her helplessness and her childlike faith? He would read: something silly, if he had it at hand. The large matters of the mind and soul were not for this unwilling vigil; and at this intruding thought of the soul he smiled, remembering how glibly he had bartered the integrity of his own to add his fragment to the rising temple of Tira's faith. He had strengthened her at the expense of his own bitter certainties. It was done deliberately and it was not to be regretted, but it did open a window upon his private rectitude. Was his state of mind to be taken so very seriously, even by himself? Not after that! Lounging before his book-shelves in search of a soporific, suddenly he remembered the mottled book. It flashed into

his mind as if a hand had hurled it there. He would read Old Crow's journal.

Settled in bed, the light beside him and the mottled book in his hand, he paused a thoughtful minute before opening it. Poor old devil! Was this the jangled record of an unsound mind, or was it the apologia for an eccentricity probably not so uncommon, after all? Foolish, he thought, to leave a record of any sort, unless you were a heaven-accredited genius, entrusted with the leaves of life. Better to recognize your own atomic insignificance, and sink willingly into the predestined sea. He opened it and took a comprehensive glance over the first page: an oblong of small neat handwriting. Many English hands were like that. He was accustomed to call it a literary hand. Over the first date he paused, to refer it back to his own years. How big was he when Old Crow had begun the diary? Seven, that was all. He was a boy of seven years, listening with an angry yet fascinated attention to the other boys talking about Old Crow, who was, they said, luny, love-cracked. He never could hear enough about the terrifying figure choosing to live up there in the woods alone, and who yet seemed so gentle and so like other folk when you met him and who gave you checkerberry lozenges. Still he was furious when the boys hooted him and then ran, because, after all, Old Crow was his own family. And with the first words, his mind started to an alert attention. The words were to him.

"I am going to write some things down for the boy," Old Crow began, in the neat-handed script. "He is a good little boy. He looks like me at his age. I had a kind of innocence. He has it, too. If he should grow up anything like me, I want him to have this letter"—the last word was crossed out and a more formal one substituted—"statement. If he thinks about things anyways

different from what the neighbors do, they will begin to laugh at him, and try to make him believe he is not in his right mind."

Over and over, through the first pages of the book, there were grammatical lapses when Old Crow, apparently from earnestness of feeling, fell into colloquial speech. This was always when he got so absorbed in his subject that he lacked the patience to go back and rewrite according to rules he certainly knew but which had ceased to govern his daily intercourse.

"He must remember he may be in his right mind, for all that. If one man thinks a thing, it might be true if forty thousand men think different. The first man that thought the earth was round, when everybody else thought it was flat, was one man. The boy will be told I was crazy. He will be told I was love-cracked. I did want Selina James. She was a sweet, pretty girl and high-headed, and the things some folks thought of her were not so. But she was the kind that takes the world as it was made and asks no questions, and when I couldn't take it so and tried to explain to her how I felt about it, she didn't know any way but to laugh. Perhaps she was afraid. And she did get sick of me and turned me off. She married and went away. I was glad she went away, because it is very hard to keep seeing anybody you thought liked you and find they didn't, after all. It keeps reminding you. It was after that time I built me the hut and came up here to live.

"Now the boy will hear it was on account of Selina James that I came up here, but it is not so, though it well might have been. It was about that time I began to understand what a hard time 'most everybody is having—except for a little while when they are young, and sometimes then—and I couldn't stand it. And I thought how

it might not be so if everybody would turn to and help everybody else, and that might be the kingdom of heaven, the same as we read about it. And then one day I went out—I was always going round the fields and woods, kind of still, because I liked to come on little animals living their own lives in their own way—and I came to the open spot up above the hut where there are the old apple trees left from the first house the Ravens lived in, on the back road, before the other road went through. And on one of the lower limbs of the apple tree was a robin and she was making that noise a robin makes when she is scared 'most to pieces, and on another limb there was a red squirrel, and he was chattering so I knew he was scared, too. And down under the tree there was a snake pointed right at a little toad, and I stamped my foot and hollered to scare him away; and that same minute he struck and the toad fell over, whether poisoned to death or scared to death I didn't know. And the snake slipped away, because he was afraid of me, just as the toad was afraid of him. And the bird smoothed down her feathers and flew away, and the squirrel run along where he was going. They had got off that time, and I suppose the next minute they forgot all about it. But I never forgot. It was just as if something had painted a picture to show me what the world was. It was full of fear. Everything was made to hunt down and kill everything else, except the innocent things that eat grass and roots, and innocent as they be —as they are—they are killed, too. And who made it so? God. So what peace could I have—what peace could anybody ever have—in a world where, from morning till night, it is war and murder and the fear of death? And what good is there in trying to bring the kingdom of heaven down to men? You can't bring it to the animals. What if you could die for men? A good many have done that

besides Jesus Christ. But who is going to die for the animals? And the animals in captivity—I saw a bear once, in a cage, walking up and down, up and down, and moaning. I saw a polar bear once trying to cool himself on a cake of ice. I saw an eagle with his wings clipped. An eagle ought to be up in the air. And all that could be done away with, by law, if men would see to it. But even then (and this is the strangest part of it, the part that won't bear thinking about) it is not only that men are unmerciful to the animals, but the animals, when they are hungry, are unmerciful to one another. I shall come back to this.

"Now about Jesus Christ. I hate to write this because, if the boy does not see things as I do, maybe it will be bad for him to read it, and he may think I am blaspheming holy things. I pray him to remember I write in earnestness and love, love for him, for the earth and for the animals. I want to tell him things look very black to me. When I think how I felt over losing Selina James it seems to me as nothing compared with the way I feel about the way the world is made. For it is all uncertainty and 'most all pain. It seems to me it is not possible for anything to be blacker than the earth is to me. I wake in the morning with a cloud over me, and when I go to bed at night the cloud is there. It settles down on me like—I don't know how to say what it is like—and I call out, up here alone in the woods. I call to God. I remember how He made the earth and I ask Him why He had to do it so. Over and over I ask Him. He does not answer. He can't. I suppose that is what it is to be God. You have to make a thing a certain way, and after it is done they have to take it, the men and the animals, and do the best they can with it. And one night when I was calling to God, there was a scream of an animal—a little animal—just

outside, and I knew an owl had got him. And I covered my ears, for it seemed as if that was God's answer to me, and I didn't want to hear any more. I even thought—and I tell the boy this so that if he has thoughts that frighten him he will have the comfort of knowing somebody has thought them before—I thought that scream was God's answer. It was a good many months before I could pray again, even to ask God why.

"Now about religion. A great many people go to church and find comfort in it, and they come home and eat meat for their dinners, meat killed—they don't know how it is killed. Sometimes it is killed the best you can and sometimes not. They don't seem to think about that. They have done their duty and gone to church, and they go out to feed the animals they are going to kill when they are fat enough, and sometimes the animals will be killed the best they can and sometimes not. And if they think about their sins, they quiet themselves by thinking Christ has taken them on His own shoulders. And so, unless somebody they love has died, or they are poor or disappointed, they say it is a very pleasant world, and they ask for another slice of beef and plan what they will do Monday, now Sunday is so far along. Now if the boy is that kind of a boy, let him be like those people who do the best they can without questioning. Let him do the best he can and not question. But if he is different, if he has to think—sometimes I am sure he will have to, for I cannot help seeing he looks out of his eyes like me. His eyes are terrible to me, for they are always asking questions, and that is what Grandmother Raven used to say to me. She used to say: 'You are always asking questions with your eyes. Stop staring and ask your questions right out.' But I couldn't. As long ago as that, I knew my questions hadn't any answers.

"Now if the boy begins to ask himself questions about Jesus Christ, whether He is the son of God, and whether He could take on Himself the sins of the world, I want to tell him that I am sure it is not so. I want the boy to remember that nobody can take away his sins: nobody but himself. He must accept his punishments. He must even go forward to meet them, for through them alone can he learn how to keep away from sin. And I want him to regard the life of Jesus Christ with love and reverence, and make his own life as much like it as he can. But I want him to remember, too, that God made him as he is, and made his father and mother and all the rest back to the first man, and that there is no guilt of sinfulness upon man as a race. There is only the burden of ignorance. We live in the dark. We were born into it. As far as our knowledge of right and wrong goes, so far are we guilty. But He has made us as we are, and if there is guilt, it is not ours."

As Raven read this, he found himself breathing heavily in the excitement of knowing what it cost the man to write so nakedly for casual eyes. To that elder generation, trained in the habit of thought that prevailed in a country region, so many years ago, it was little short of blasphemy. He turned a page, and had a cumulative surprise. For time had leaped. The date was seven years later. Old Crow was now over sixty, and this was the year before his death. Raven could hardly believe in the likelihood of so wide a leap, but the first line showed him it was actual. The subject matter was different and so was the style. The sentences raced as if they were in a hurry to get themselves said before the pen should drop from a palsied hand.

"I gave up writing with that last line. I thought there was no more to say. I didn't even want to read it over.

If I hadn't said it well, still I had said it and I didn't see any better way. I wanted to fortify the boy against the loneliness of feeling there was nobody that understood. I wanted to tell him I understood. That was all I could do for him at that time. But a great deal more has happened. The last of it happened over two years ago, but I was too busy to write it down. Besides, I didn't know there would be such things to write. The boy knows me a little now. He comes up oftener. His mother brings him. She is very sweet and gentle, but she will not leave him alone with me because I am queer and she is afraid I may teach him to be queer. She does not understand. She wouldn't if I told her. She takes things as they are. There are no questions in her mind. There will be in the boy's. They have begun to come. I can see them more than ever by the look in his eyes. Several years ago, about when I finished writing in this book, I saw I should have to give up questioning myself and calling on God. There were no answers. If there were, He didn't mean to let me have them. I mustn't keep on. It was dangerous. I got no good out of it and I should come to harm. And if I had got to live, I must be as near like other folks as I could. So I must be as busy as I could. And it came to me that over beyond the mountain there were folks poorer than I am, and that knew less, a good deal less. I didn't know anything about God, but I did know I must keep clean and eat the right food. So I begun to take long tramps round the countryside, and wherever I went I'd try to find out the sick and, if the family was poor, work for them a while and sit up with the sick one, and, if he was discouraged, try to help him through.

"So it happened I was away from the hut a good deal of the time, and I got an idea the Ravens liked that. It must have touched their pride to have Old Crow living up

here alone, queer as Dick's hat-band. Whichever way I fixed it, I was a kind of a curse: for when I went off on my wanderings I was a tramp and the news of it came back home, and I often think the boy's mother was sorry and wished I wouldn't, though even that was better than my being around, toleing off the boy. I liked my wanderings, in summer best of all. But in winter the folks needed me more, shut up so in tight houses, catching colds in bad air, and it got so when they were sick they'd send for me and I was proper pleased to go. And they came to have a kind of a trust in me, and I was nearer being contented than I'd been in my whole life. Because the questions didn't come hardly at all, now. I was too busy by day and too tired at night. So it went on till one day I came to old Billy Jones's little house, where he lived all alone in the dirt and filth. It was just at the foot of the mountain and no neighbors under half a mile. I say he lived there, but he wasn't there more than a third of the time. The boy will remember how he used to go along the road, full as a tick, and the school children making fun of him and then running before he could get at them. I don't know as he would, though. There never was any harm in him, only he did neglect himself so he was an awful sight. And the only time he was in his little house was when he'd been hired out haying or something, and got his money and spent it and come back with crackers and cheese in his old carpet bag, to sober up.

"This day I was speaking about (it was October and no wind) I was going by his house and I saw a smoke coming out of the chimney, and I thought old Billy had come home to sober up. But I hadn't hardly got to the house before I heard him calling me, and I looked and there he was in the front door leaning on a cane.

"'You come in here,' says he, and I went in.

"It was a terrible hog's nest, his front room was, but I paid no attention, for that's the way he lived. He sat down in a chair and made a motion with his hand for me to come near, and I did, and he took my hand and put it on his knee.

" 'Feel that,' he says. And when I didn't know what he meant, nor care hardly, for I thought he might be in drink, he called out, in a queer voice—sharp it was, and pitiful—and says he: 'My legs are swelling. Hard as a rock.'

"Then I saw he was in a trouble of fear, and I asked him questions and he told me how long it had been coming on and how he went to the doctor down to the street, and the doctor told him he was a sick man, and how he would grow worse instead of better and could never take care of himself in the world, and the doctor would get him sent to the Poor Farm. That was his trouble. He did not want to go to the Farm, and when I told him it was the right way, he broke down and shook and cried and said he was afraid to go. Then he told me why. The boy must not read this until he is grown up, but when he is, he will hear there was a man killed over across the mountain: Cyrus Graves, a poor, good-for-nothing creature as it was said. (But God made him.) He was found by the side of the road, and it was thought he had words with a peddler that went along that day and never was found afterward. But some thought the authorities never tried so hard as they might to find the peddler, because Cyrus was such a poor good-for-nothing that he was well rid of, and if the peddler was found and not convicted he might come back and burn their barns. And when old Billy Jones was shaking there before me, I kept asking him what he was afraid of, and he said:

" 'Will you promise not to tell?'

"I said I would. And he said:

" 'It was me that killed Cyrus Graves. We were coming home together, and we had both had a drop too much, and we had words about something, I forget what. And which of us struck first I don't know, but I know I struck him and he fell pitch-polling down the side of the road into the gully and I went home and crawled into bed. And the next day they found him, and I said I came home across lots, and there was a man that met me and he said it was so and I was so far gone in liquor I never could have raised my head again that night, once I'd laid down and begun to sleep it off. But he never knew I did raise my head for I was not so well started as common and I went out again about ten to fill up. And it was then I met Cyrus Graves.'

"I told him there was but one thing for him to do. He must send for the sheriff and give himself up. But he cried out at that and said:

" 'Look at my poor legs. Do you think a man with such legs as mine has got strength enough to be hung?'

"I told him he would not be hung. He was a very sick man, and there was no court of law in the world so unmerciful as not to take that into account. But he would not do it. He had not meant to kill Cyrus Graves, he said, and he would not die a murderer and known for one. And that was why he would not go to the Poor Farm. As he got sicker, he might be delirious or talk in his sleep. Rave, that was the word he used. He might rave. After he stopped speaking, I sat thinking it over, and he watched my face. He spoke first, and he spoke as if he could hardly wait to hear the answer and yet was obliged to hear it.

" 'Ain't you goin' to say you'll come here an' take care of me?' he said. 'My time won't be long.'

"Then I could see my going round taking care of the sick had made him turn to me. That was the way with all of them round here. They turned to me. It was the only comfort I had. I told him I could not take care of him there. It was no fit place. I thought a spell longer, and he watched me. His eyes were full of fear. The little animals look like that when they are trapped. Then I told him I would have him brought over to the hut if he would come, and he jumped at it. I scarcely ever saw a man so wild with thankfulness. And the next day I hired a team and went over after him, and I took care of him to the end."

Here was a heavy dash. Raven could imagine Old Crow's drawing the line with one impatient stroke because he had got so far in a story he could ill stop to write, but that had to be written. Raven had forgotten Tira up there in the lonesome woods, forgotten a day was very near when she would have to make one more of her desperate decisions. He was thinking of Old Crow.

XXIII

He went on reading:

"There is no need of going into old Billy's sickness. It made a great change in my life. As soon as it got about that I had taken him to live with me, folks began to say I was queer, the same as they did before, and the children would hoot and run. He was known to be so bad (they had always called him bad; they never once thought God made him) they thought I liked to keep company with him because I must be bad, too. And I could not go about any more doing for people because I was doing for him and there was no time. But people kept sending for me, and when they saw old Billy Jones sitting there with his bandaged legs, they would feel hard toward me. They said I would rather do for him than for them, and he ought, by rights, to be on the town. That meant his going to the Farm. Sometimes I thought they felt so about it there might be action taken to get him there—to the Poor Farm. He never thought of this, I am sure. He had a peaceful time, as much so as a man could have that has killed his body and begins to be afraid he has killed his soul. That was the hardest time I had with him: about his soul. He was afraid to die. I told him God made him and would see to him in the end, and that He well knew he did not mean to kill Cyrus Graves. He said that was true, but if he had been tried here in a court of law the jury would have pronounced him guilty and it was very likely God would. And there was hell. These

things I could not answer because I did not know, and if I had any convictions they were as dark as his, though of another sort. But I did try to put heart into him, and I hoped the end would come before he suffered any more.

"I want the boy to know that all this time his mother was a very great comfort to me. Of course she could not let the boy come up to the hut, because old Billy Jones was too dreadful a sight for a child to see. But she cooked a great many delicate things and brought them up or sent them, and, one day I shall never forget, when I had a blind headache and had to lie down in the dark, she sat with Billy a long time, to keep him from being lonesome, and afterward I found she had bandaged his legs.

"As time went on and he grew worse and worse, there was but one thing he wanted. It was to be forgiven. I tried again to persuade him to tell publicly the straight story of the killing and so die with a clean mind. This he would not do. He had asked me to get him a headstone, with his name on it all complete, and he was much set against being remembered as a murderer. All his life he had lived outside the law, so to speak, and he wanted to die respectable. I told him it might happen to him that, after his death, somebody would be accused of the death of Cyrus Graves and in that case I should break my promise to him and tell. To this he consented, though unwillingly, and I am now telling, not only for the sake of the boy, but for the sake of all to whom the boy may have to pass on the strange things that came to Billy Jones. His sickness went on in a very painful way, and when it got to be near the end he was still more distressed in mind. He could not die, he said, unless he was forgiven. And yet he had to die. For a while he seemed

almost to hate me because I could not show him the way.

" 'If I was a Roman Catholic,' he said, 'and you was a priest, you could forgive me yourself. You would forgive me, I'll warrant ye.'

"I did not deny it, though I felt very hopeless of anything I might do. In those last days I could have denied him nothing. He seemed to me like all the trouble in the world beating out there in the hut. God had made him, and made him so that he did not rightly see good from evil, and he had ruined his body, and now he was taking the consequences. And the night before he died, he cried out a terrible voice:

" 'You don't say a word about Jesus Christ.'

"I stood by his bed in anguish of mind perhaps as great as his. Yet not as great, for he had no strength of body to bear the anguish with.

" 'You never have said anything,' he went on.

"I felt as if he was accusing me of not giving him water when he was fevered, or bread if he was hungry. Then he said he remembered something he used to hear when he was little and he had hardly ever heard of it since. But he had heard other things. And I guessed he was remembering he had lived with the people who used the name of Jesus Christ only to swear by. He had heard, he told me, that Jesus Christ was the son of God, and God sent Him here to save sinners, and, if sinners called on Him to save them, they would be saved. And then he looked at me for a minute with that same look, as if he hated me, and he said:

" 'You don't believe it. You wouldn't let me suffer like this, if you did.'

"And all my spirit broke up in me, and my legs were weak under me, and the tears ran down on my face, and I said to him:

" 'I do believe it.'

" 'Will you swear it?' he asked me. He was very wild then. 'Will you swear by Jesus Christ it is so?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'I will swear.'

"And I fell on my knees by the bed and said: 'Let us pray.' And I prayed, in what words I don't know, but my hand was on his, and when I said Amen, he said Amen, too, and when I looked at him all the trouble was smoothed out of his face and he said, 'Jesus Christ!' as he never could have said it in his life before. It was as if you were speaking to your mother or your friend (yet not just a friend, but a heavenly friend) and shortly he died. And I had told him a lie. But I was not sorry. I was glad. What was my keeping my poor soul clean to old Billy Jones's dying in peace? It was the last thing I could give him, and he was welcome to it.

"It was in the early morning he died, and I did what I knew about making him right for his coffin, and then went down to get one of the neighbors that knew more, and all that day I was busy. The next day he would be taken away and lie in the Methodist church at the Ridge, and the third day he would be buried. And nobody had ever taken any interest in him except to call him a poor good-for-nothing creature—nobody except your mother (she is a good woman) but it looked as if he would have a well-attended funeral. I was glad of that, for I knew he would be pleased. He was laid out in the bedroom of the hut and the window was open and the cold air blowing on him, and I lay down on the couch in the large room. I didn't take my clothes off, for at such times it is respectful to have watchers about the dead. It may not be necessary, but it is the custom, and I wanted old Billy to have everything that was fitting and right. I did not mean to go to sleep, but lie there a spell and then get up

and put on more wood and go into his cold room and let him feel as if he was being taken care of to the last. And I lay there thinking how I had heard there was diphtheria over beyond the mountain and I would take a day or two to rest me and then I'd go over there and help. I laughed a little to myself, and I see now it wasn't a very pleasant kind of laugh, for I thought the people would begin to like me again because I was free to do for them.

"And I did go to sleep, being, as I said, very tired, and how long I slept I don't know. But suddenly I waked up, just as wide awake as I am this minute, and I knew as well as I ever knew anything, that Billy Jones was in the room. I didn't see him. I didn't hear him. I didn't hear anything, outside or in. It was a very still night, and there wasn't even the creaking of the branches against each other. But Billy Jones was in the room. I wasn't afraid, but I felt queer. I had a kind of prickly feeling all over me. The hair on my head moved somehow, according to the feeling it gave me. Perhaps that was being afraid, only I don't take it so. The reason I think differently is that I didn't want it to stop. If Billy Jones was there, I didn't want him to go away. If he had anything to say, I wanted to hear it. And I was as sure as ever I was of anything in my life that there was something to say. If this was the beginning of something that was going to happen, it was only the beginning. There was more to come. And I wanted to know what. I lay there as still almost as Billy's body in the next room. I was afraid of missing something. If there was something for me to hear I'd got to keep still to hear it. But I said that before. I have to keep saying it, it took such hold of me. The fire hadn't wholly died down. I could tell by that I hadn't been asleep long. But I didn't dare to get up and put on another stick. I was afraid

if I moved I might jar something and it would break. And I couldn't have it break till the end—the end of my knowing what it was.

"And now the boy must remember that what follows, if I live to write it, is faithful and true. That is what the Bible says about things like that: they are faithful and true. And mine are just as true. It seemed to me as if the ceiling of the room raised up and the walls opened out and the room was as if it was not. Whether I looked through it or whether it was gone, I do not know. But I looked into a great space. And it was dark and at one side of it there was a great light. And the light was not angry, as a sunset looks when it flames and flares. It was steady, and I knew it was to light the world. And there came into my head some words: 'And the darkness comprehended it not.' When I waked up, I found the words in the Bible, but that night it seemed to me they were said for the first time. The boy must remember Billy Jones was in all this. He was the chief part of it. As to the words, it was as if Billy Jones said them. I was in the darkness, and I was to be made to comprehend. And when I looked lower through the darkness—and I cannot tell how, but I seemed to be in it and yet at the same time I was above it, so that I looked down and saw what was going on—I saw multitudes of men and women, trying to get through it. Sometimes they walked slowly, as if it was hard to walk, and sometimes they jostled each other and sometimes stopped to push one another about, and sometimes when some were down the others stamped on them. But they were all going somewhere, and it was toward the light. And as I say, I was in the darkness though I could see through it, and I wondered if I was going, too.

"And then I understood. I couldn't tell the boy how I understood, not if he was here to ask me; but it was as

if a voice spoke and told me in two or three words, and few as they were, I took them in and I knew. Perhaps there was a voice. Perhaps it was the voice of Billy Jones. There is no reason why not. The minute after he got out of his body, he might have known everything: I don't mean everything, I mean the one thing that would explain it all. And he had a kindness for me, and if he learned anything that smoothed out his trouble and turned it into joy, he would want me to know, too. And this is it, though now I have got to the place for telling it, I don't know how. It is like a dream. You have to tell it the minute you wake, or it is gone. I saw that creation had been a long time going on. I saw that although we have minds to think with, we haven't really, in comparison with the things to be thought out. I saw that we are so near the dust that we can no more account for the ways of Almighty God than the owl hooting out there in the woods can read the words I am writing here. I saw that nothing is to be told us. We are to find out everything for ourselves, just as we have found electricity and the laws of physics. And poisons—we have found out those, some of them, even if we had to die to do it. And God lets us die trying to find out. He doesn't care anything about our dying. And if He doesn't care anything about our dying, He doesn't care anything about the rabbit broken by the owl, or the toad struck by the snake.

"Now, why doesn't He care? For the first time, I knew there was a reason that was not a cruel reason. I knew His reasons were all good. And I saw that though He could not break the rules of His plan by telling us things, He could give us a kind of a something inside us that should make us work it out ourselves. We had hungers. We had one hunger for eternal life. We had to believe in it, to help us bear this present life. We believed it so

hard that men rose up and said it was so, and we said God had put the words into their mouths. And out of our sufferings, pity was born, and now and then a man would be raised up so full of pity that other men believed in him and followed everything he said and even called him a god. And this was well, because if they had not thought he was a god, they might not have followed him. And I seemed to be told that a great many men were born who were sent from God, but I have not read many books and how can I prove whether it is true?

"But Jesus Christ came, and His story is the story of the will of God. For men believed His father was God. That is to keep in our minds always the fatherhood of God. And his mother was believed to be a virgin. I do not know how to say this, but I was given to believe that that was no more true than I had thought, but still that it was the truest of all. It is one of the things we are to believe. We are to learn from it—how can I say?—that there is a heavenly birth out of purity and light. It is a symbol. That is the word: a symbol. And His death for mankind is the everlasting symbol of man's duty: to die for one another. And He went into the grave, and ascended into heaven, and so shall we all die and live again. But every observance of every church is a symbol —nothing more. And the man that was a god is a symbol and nothing more. But nothing could be more. For to find a symbol that has lasted, in one form or another, since the beginning of the world is to learn that it is something the world itself is built on. It is the picture book we are given before we can read print. And it means that something is working out—and is not yet—and the eye of man hath not seen or the ear of man heard. And about fear—that is the most wonderful of all and the hardest to tell. It is our friend. At first everything

fed upon everything else; and so it does now, for how shall I say the animal has fear and the growing plant has not? And our fear tells us what to turn away from, and it fits us for the fight of the mortal life. But in the end will our fear be only the fear of evil? Fear is our counselor. It is our friend.

"Now perhaps I have done wrong in trying to write this out. Perhaps I have not helped the boy or anybody he tells. Perhaps I have offended them. I know the sound of what I must have heard and the sight of what I saw was clearer to me before I tried to tell about them. At first I kept them back somewhere in my mind and didn't try to see them or hear them too close. And when I did that, the great light was always there and I was running toward it. But now I have tried to tell, I see it is no more than words. They darken counsel. And I have put it back into my mind, not so much to be thought about as to have at hand. And all my trouble has gone. It has been a long trouble. I am over sixty now. But I am not afraid of anything and I am not in doubt. When I see men suffering, I know they are suffering for a reason. When I find the bird with a broken wing or the rabbit bit by the trap I know God knows about them, and if I cannot know, it proves it is not necessary I should. For there is the great light. (But it is not likely the boy will see this account of it at all, because I shall try to write it over—to write it better—and if I make it clearer this will be destroyed.)

"Another thing: about the worship of God. He does not want us to worship Him as we understand it, to crawl before Him as if He were an idol we had set up to get us victories over our enemies and to fill us with food. He wants us—what shall I say?—to open our hearts and our minds and our ears and eyes to what He wants us to

know. He is not an idol. He is God. And all the way to Him, the horrible way through burnt offerings, the blood of lambs and goats—blood, blood, all the way—is the way that climbs up to the real sacrifice, the last of all: the man's own heart.

"One thing more: the greatest thing that ever happened to me was old Billy Jones. Was it because I was sorry for him? Was it because I could do something for him? I don't know. But I tell the boy that the man or the woman that makes him shed his blood in pity for them, that is the man or woman that will open his eyes to what we call Eternal Life. What is Eternal Life? Is it living forever? I do not know. But the words—those two words—stand for the great light ahead of us, the light I truly saw. And what the light is, still I do not know. But this I know: God is. He lives. And He is sorry. The boy may tell me this is no more than the words about His caring for the sparrow that falleth. But I tell him it is more to me, for this I have found out for myself. And I have found it out through great tribulation. But the tribulation is not now. It has stopped. It stopped with the sound of old Billy Jones's voice I heard—somehow I heard it—when his body lay in there dead. And I am not afraid. I am not afraid of fear—even for the little animals—and that is more than for myself. And that is my legacy to the boy. He must not be afraid."

There it ended, and Raven sat for a long time looking at the fine painstaking script and seeing, for the moment, at least, the vision of Old Crow. He felt a great welling of love toward him, a longing to get hold of him somehow and tell him the journal had done its work. He understood. And it meant to him, in its halting simplicity, more than all the books he had ever read on the destiny of man. Meager as it was, it seemed to him something

altogether new, because it had come out of the mind of an ignorant man, if a man can be called ignorant who has used his mind to its full capacity of thought and unconsciously fitted it, so far as he might, to the majestic simplicities of the Bible. Old Crow had never read anything about legend or the origins of belief. There were no such books then at Wake Hill. He read no language but his own. Whatever he had evolved, out of the roots of longing, had been done in the loneliness of the remote shepherd who charts the stars. And in the man himself Raven had found a curious companionship. Their lives seemed to have run a parallel course. Old Crow, like himself, was a victim of world sickness. And his wound had been cleansed; he had been healed.

Raven did give a little smile to the thought that, at least, the man had been saved one thing: he had no authoritative Amelia on his track to betray him to organized benevolence. And for himself something, he could not adequately tell what, was as clear to him as a road of light to unapprehended certainties. It was a symbol. It was the little language men had to talk in because they could not use the language of the stars: their picture language. But it was the rude token of ineffable reality. As the savage's drawing of a man stands for the man, so the symbols wrought out by the hungry world stand for what is somewhere, yet not visibly here. For the man exists or the savage could not have drawn him. Not all the mystics, he thought, smiling over his foolish inner conviction that could not be reached through the mind but only through the heart, not all the divines, could have set up within him the altar of faith he seemed suddenly to see before him: it had to be Old Crow. And he slept, and in the morning it did not need the mottled book at his bedside to remind him. Still it was Old Crow.

He put it all away in his mind to think over later, just as Old Crow had turned aside from his vision for the more convincing clearness of an oblique angle upon it, and dressed hastily. He got out of the house without meeting even Charlotte, and was about crossing the road on the way to the hut when he saw Tenney coming, axe and dinner pail in hand. Raven swerved on his path, and affected to be looking down the road. He could not proceed the way he was going. Tenney's mind must not be drawn toward that living focus by even the most fragmentary hint. Yet if Tira was still there, she and the child must be fed. After his glance down the road he turned back to the house, nodding at Tenney as he neared. But Tenney motioned to him.

"Here," he called stridently. "You wait."

Raven halted and as Tenney was approaching, at a quick stride, noted how queerly he was hung. It was like a skeleton walking, the dry joints acting spasmodically. When the man came up with him, he saw how ravaged his face was, and yet lighted by what a curious eagerness. Ready, he hoped, at all points for any possible attack involving Tira, Raven still waited, and the question Tenney shot at him could not have been more surprising:

"Did you find salvation?"

Raven stood looking at him for an instant, and suddenly he remembered Old Crow, who had accomplished the salvation of a sick heart and bequeathed the treasure to him.

"Yes," he said, more tolerantly than he had ever spoken to Tenney. "I think I did."

Was it his imagination that Tenney looked disappointed?

"Last night?" the man insisted. "Did you find it last night? Through me?"

"No," said Raven. "I didn't find it through you."

Tenney was ingenuously taken aback.

"There is one way," he said, "into the sheepfold—only one."

He turned about, muttering, and Raven, looking after him, thought he was an ugly customer. For a woman to be shut up alone with him, her young, too, to defend! It was like being jailed with an irrational beast. But Tenney paid no further attention to him. He walked away, swinging his dinner pail, down across the meadow to the lower woods, and Raven, after the fringe of birches had closed upon him, hurried off to the hut. He did not expect to find her. The pail in Tenney's hand was sufficient evidence, even if the man's going to his work were not. Tenney would never have abandoned his search or his waiting for her, and if he had, he would not have delayed to pack a dinner pail. The hut was empty of human life, but the bricks were warm. She could not have left until the early morning. Mechanically he piled kindling near the hearth. But curiously, though the hut was warm not only with the fire but the suggestion of her breathing presence, it was not she who seemed to be with him but Old Crow.

He went back to the house and found Amelia in traveling dress, her face tuned to the note of concentration when something was to be done. She was ready. She had the appearance of the traveler needing only to slip on an outer garment to go, not merely from New Hampshire down to Boston, but to uncharted fastnesses. It meant, he found, this droll look of being prepared for anything, not the inconsiderable journey before her but a new enterprise for him. And he would have to be persuaded to it. Well, she knew that. She met him in the hall.

"John," she said, with the firmness of her tone in active

benevolences, "I have asked Jerry to take me to the train. I want you to go with me."

"Me?" said Raven, unaffectedly surprised. "What for?"

"For several things. If Dick is in any sort of trouble——"

"He's not," said Raven. "Take my word for that."

"And," she concluded, "I want you to see somebody."

"Somebody?" Raven repeated. He put his hand on her shoulder, smiling down at her. Milly was a good sort. It was too bad she had to be, like so many women benevolence mad, so disordered in her meddling. "I suppose you mean an alienist."

She nodded, her lips compressed. She would stick at nothing.

"Now Milly," said Raven, "do I seem to you in the least dotty?"

Tears came into her eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't use such words," she said tremulously. It meant much for Milly to tremble. "It's like calling that dreadful influenza the flu."

Raven was reminded of the old man down the road who forbade secular talk in the household during a thunder shower. It "madded" the Almighty. You might be struck.

"I won't," he said, the more merciful of her because she was on the point of going. "And I won't go back with you."

"Will you come later?" she persisted, still tremulous.

"No," said Raven, "probably not. If I do, I'll let you know. And you mustn't come up here without notifying me well in advance."

"That shows——" she began impulsively. "John, that isn't a normal thing to say: to expect your own sister to notify you."

"All right," said Raven cheerfully. "Then I'm not

normal. The funny part of it is, I don't care whether I'm normal or not. I've got too many other things to think of. Here's Charlotte with your brekky. Come on."

In the two hours before she went, he was, she told Dick afterward, absolutely scintillating. She never knew John could be so brilliant. He talked about things she never knew he had the slightest interest in: theosophy and feminism and Americanization. She couldn't help wondering whether he was trying to convince her of his mental soundness. But he certainly was amazing. Dick received this in silence. He understood.

It was true. Raven did fill the time from a racing impetuosity, only slackened when Jerry appeared with the pung. Then he hurried her into her coat, kissed her warmly—and she had to comment inwardly that she had never found John so affectionate—and, standing bareheaded to watch her away, saluted her when she turned at the bend in the road. Then, when the scene was empty of her, he plunged in, past Charlotte, standing with hands rolled in her apron, snatched his cap, and hurried up the road to Nan.

XXIV

Raven, relieved of his hindering Amelia, felt extraordinarily gay. He went fast along the road, warm in the deepening sun, and saw Nan coming toward him. He waved his cap and called to her:

"She's gone."

"Who?" Nan was coming on with her springing stride, and when she reached him she looked keenly at him, adding: "What's happened to you, Rookie?"

Nothing had happened to her, he could see. She was always like a piece cut out of the morning and fitted into any part of the day she happened to be found in: always of a gallant spirit, always wholesome as apples, always ready. This was not altogether youth. It was, besides, something notable and particular which was Nan. He laughed out, she caught his mood so deftly.

"Something has happened," he said. "First place, Milly's gone. Second, I've found Old Crow."

"You've found Old Crow? What do you mean by that?"

"Can't tell you now. Wait till we sit down together."

"And she's truly gone?"

They stood there in the road as if Nan's house were not at hand; but the air and the sun were pleasant to them.

"Gone, bag and baggage. Dick wired and ordered her in some way she didn't dare ignore. I suspect he did it to save me. He's a good boy."

"He is a good boy," said Nan. There was a reminiscent

look in her eyes. "But he's a very little one. Were we ever so young, Rookie, you and I?"

"You!"

"Yes. I'm a sphinx compared with Dick. I didn't tell you last night, there was so much else to say, but I had a letter from him, returned to Boston from New York. He assumed, you know, if I wasn't in Boston I'd gone to the Seaburys'. So he wrote there."

"What's he want?"

Nan hesitated a moment. Then she said:

"It's a pretty serious letter, Rookie. I suppose it's a love-letter.'

"Don't you know?"

"Yes, I suppose I know. But it's so childish. He's furious, then he's almost on his knees begging, and then he goes back to being mad again. Rookie, he's so young."

"When it comes to that," said Raven, "you're young, too. I've told you that before."

"Young! Oh! but not that way. I couldn't beg for anything. I couldn't cry if I didn't get it. I don't know what girls used to do, but we're different, Rookie, we that have been over there."

"Yes," said Raven, "but you mustn't let it do too much to you. You mustn't let it take away your youth."

Nan shook her head.

"Youth isn't so very valuable," she said, "not that part of it. There's lots of misery in it, Rookie. Don't you know there is?"

"Yes," said Raven, "I know." Suddenly he remembered Anne and the bonds she had laid on him. Had he not suffered them, in a dumb way, finding no force within himself to strike them off? Had he been a coward, a dull fellow tied to women's restraining wills? And he had

by no means escaped yet. Wasn't Anne inexorably by his side now, when he turned for an instant from the problem of Tira, saying noiselessly, this invisible force that was Anne: "What are you going to do about my last wish, my last command? You are thinking about Nan, about that strange woman, about yourself. Think about me." But he deliberately summoned his mind from the accusing vision of her, and turned it to Nan. "Then," he said, "there doesn't seem to be much hope for Dick, poor chap!"

"Doesn't there?" she inquired, a certain indignant passion in her voice. "Anyway, there's no hope for me. I'd like to marry Dick. I'd like to feel perfectly crazy to marry him. He won't write his poetry always. That's to the good, anyhow. If I don't marry him I shall be a miserable old thing, more and more positive, more and more like all the women of the family, the ones that didn't marry"—and they both knew Aunt Anne was in her mind—"drying rose leaves and hunting up genealogical trash."

"But, my own child," said Raven in a surge of pity for her, as if some clearest lens had suddenly brought her nearer him, "you don't have to marry Dick to get away from that. You'll simply marry somebody else."

"No," said Nan, "you know I sha'n't."

"Then," said Raven, "there is somebody else."

She shook her head.

"I'm an odd number, Rookie," she said, with a bitterness he found foreign to her. "All those old stories of kindred souls may be true, but they're not true for me."

"You have probably," said Raven, a sharp light now on her, bringing out the curves and angles of her positive mind, "you have done some perverse thing to send him off, and you won't move a finger to bring him back."

Nan laughed. She was no longer bitter. This was the child he knew.

"Rookie," she said, "you are nearer an absolute fool than any human being I ever saw. If I wanted a man back, it's likely I could get him. Most of us can. But do you think I would?"

"Then you're proud, sillykins."

"I'm not proud," said Nan—and yet proudly. "If I loved anybody, I'd let him walk over me. That's what Charlotte would say. Can't you hear her? It isn't for my sake. It's for his. Do you think I'd bamboozle him and half beckon and half persuade, the way women do, and trap him into the great enchantment? It is an enchantment. You know it is. But I'd rather he'd keep his grip on things—on himself—and walk away from me, if that's where it took him. I'd rather he'd walk straight off to somebody else, and break his heart, if it came that way."

"Good Lord, Nan," said Raven, "where do you get such thoughts?"

"Get them?" she repeated. "I got them from you first. You've been a slave all your life. Don't you know you have? Don't you know you had cobwebs spun round you, round and round, till she had you tight, hand and foot, not hers but so you couldn't walk off to anybody else? And even now, after her death——"

"Stop," said Raven. "That's enough, Nan."

Again Anne Hamilton was beside them on the wintry road, and they were hurting her inexpressibly.

"That's it," said Nan. "You're afraid she'll hear."

"If I am," said Raven, "it's not——" There he stopped.

"No," said Nan. She had relented. Her eyes were soft. "You're not afraid of her. But you are afraid of

hurting her. And even that's weak, Rookie—in a man. Don't be so pitiful. Leave it to the women."

Raven laughed a little now. Again she seemed a child, crying after the swashbuckling hero modern man has put into the discard, where apparently he has to stay, except now and then when he ventures out and struts a little. But it avails him nothing. Somebody laughs, and back he has to go.

"I am pretty stupid," he said. "But never mind about an old stager like me. Don't be afraid of showing him—the man, I mean—all your charm. Don't be afraid of going to his head. You've got enough to justify every possible hope you could hold out to him. You're the loveliest—Nan, you're the loveliest thing I ever saw."

"The loveliest?" said Nan, again recklessly. "Lovelier than Tira?"

For an instant she struck him dumb. Was Tira so lovely? To him certainly she had a beauty almost inexpressible. But was it really inherent in her? Or was it something in the veil he found about her, that haze of hopeless suffering?

"Do you think she's beautiful?"

His voice was keen; curiosity had thinned it to an edge. Nan answered it with exactness.

"I think she's the most beautiful thing I ever saw. She doesn't know it. If she did, she'd probably wave her hair and put on strange chiffons, what Charlotte calls dewdads. She'd have to be the cleverest woman on earth to resist them. And because she's probably never been an inch out of this country neighborhood, she'd rig herself up—Charlotte again!—in the things the girls like round here. But she either doesn't know her power or she doesn't care."

"I'm inclined to think," said Raven slowly, "she never has looked at herself in that way. It has brought her

things she doesn't want, things that made her suffer. And she's worked so hard trying to manage the whole business —life and her sufferings—she hasn't had time to lay much stress on her looks."

"It's all so strange," said Nan, as if the barriers were down and she wanted to indicate something hardly clear to herself. "You see, she isn't merely beautiful. Most of us look like what we are. We're rather nice looking, like me, or we're plain. But she 'takes back,' as Charlotte would say. She reminds you of things, pictures, and music, and dead queens—isn't there a verse about 'queens that died young and fair'?—and—O heavens, Rookie! I can't say it—but all the old hungers and happinesses, the whole business."

"I wonder," said Raven impetuously, "if you think she's got any mind at all. Or whether it's nothing but line and color?"

Nan shook her head.

"She's got something better than a mind. She has a faithful heart. And if a man—a man I cared about—got bewitched by her, I'd tell him to snatch her up and run off with her, and even if he found she was hollow inside, he'd have had a minute worth living for, and he could take his punishment and say 'twas none too much."

"You'd tell him!" Raven suggested, smiling at her heat and yet moved by it. "You weren't going to fetter your man by telling him anything."

"No," said Nan, returned to her composure, which was of a careless sort, "I shouldn't, really. I'd hope though. I'd allow myself to hope he'd snatch her away from that queer devil's darning needle she's married to, and buy her a divorce and marry her."

"You would, indeed! Then you don't know love, my

Nan, for you don't know jealousy. And with a mystery woman like that, wouldn't the man be forever wondering what's behind that smile of hers? Tenney wonders. It isn't that flashy fellow at the prayer-meeting that makes him wonder. It's the woman herself. Yet she's simplicity itself—she's truth—but no, Nan, you don't know jealousy."

"Don't I?" said Nan, unperturbed. "You're mighty clever, aren't you, Rookie? But I tell you again I'd rather leave my man to live his life as he wants it than live it with him. Now"—she threw off the moment as if she had permanently done with it—"now, I went to see her this morning."

"You did? What for?"

"It was so horrible last night," said Nan. "Hideous! There was that creature sitting there beside her, that perfumery man."

"Perfumery?"

"Yes. He smelled like the soap the boys used to buy, the ones that lived 'down the road a piece.' He frightened her, just his sitting down beside her. And it put some kind of a devil into that awful Tenney. I thought about her all night, and this morning I went over and asked her to go back with me now, while Tenney's away chopping. I told her I'd help her pack, and Jerry'd take us to the train."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing. Oh, yes, she did." Nan laughed, in the irritation of it. "She said I was real good. Said Israel was going to kill soon."

"Kill?"

"Hogs. There were two. They'd weigh three hundred apiece. It was quite a busy season, trying out and all, and no time for her to be away."

It was irresistible. They both laughed. They had been dowering her with the grace of Helen, and now she stood before them inexorably bent on trying out.

"I gather," said Nan, rather drily, "you're going over to see her yourself."

"Yes," said Raven. "But not till I've seen you. You ran away from Milly. Now Milly's gone, and you're coming back."

Her eyes roved from him to the steadfast green of the slope across the road. She was moved. Her mouth twitched at the tight corners, her eyes kindled.

"It would be fun," said she.

"Besides, think how silly to keep Charlotte provisioning you and tugging over to spend nights, poor Charlotte!"

"I really stayed," said Nan, temporizing, "for this Tira of yours—and Tenney's."

This form of statement sounded malicious to her own ears, but not to his. Sometimes Nan wished he were not quite so "simple honest." It was, she suspected, the woman's part—her own—to be unsuspecting and obstinately good.

"But if," she continued, "she won't have anything to do with you, I might as well go back to town."

"Not yet," said Raven. "I've got something to tell you."

"What's it about?"

"Old Crow."

Nan thought a minute.

"All right," she said. She looked at once unreasonably happy, like, he extravagantly thought, a beautiful statue with the fountain of life playing over it. "I'll come—for Old Crow."

"Pick up your duds," said he, "and I'll go along and

see if I can make anything out of her. You be ready when I come back."

Nan looked after him and thought how fast he walked and how Tira, as well as Tira's troubles, drew him. If Tira knew the power of her own beauty, how terribly decisive a moment this would be in the great dark kitchen Nan had just left! And yet if Tira, having looked in her mirror and the mirror of life, were cruelly sophisticated enough to play that part, the man would be given odds to resist her. He was no ingenuous youth.

XXV

Raven walked up to the side door of the house and knocked. She came at once, her face blank of any expectation, though at seeing him she did stand a little tenser and her lips parted with a quicker breath.

"Good morning," said he. "Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Oh!" breathed Tira. It seemed she did actually consider keeping him out. "I don't know," she blundered. "I'm alone, but I never feel certain——"

She never felt certain, he concluded, whether her peril might not be upon her. But he had a sense of present security. He had seen Tenney disappearing inside the fringe of woods.

"Let me come in," he said quietly. "I want to talk to you. It's cold for you out here."

She moved aside and he followed her to the kitchen. The room was steaming with warmth, the smell of apple sauce and a boiling ham. Her moulding board, dusted with flour, was on the table, and her yellow mixing bowl beside it. Raven did not think what household duties he might be delaying, but the scene was sweet to him: a haven of homely comfort where she ought to find herself secure. There was, in the one casual glance he took, no sign of the child, and he was glad. That strange, silent witness, since Nan and Charlotte had both, by a phrase, banished the little creature into an alien room of its own, had begun to embarrass him. He wanted to talk to Tira alone.

"Baby's in the bedroom," said Tira, answering his thought. "When he's in here, I wake him up steppin' round."

Raven stood waiting for her to sit, and she drew forward a chair, placing it to give her an oblique view from the window. Having seated herself, she asked him, with a shy hospitality:

"Won't you set?"

He drew a chair nearer her and his eyes sought her in the light of what Nan had said. Yes, she was beautiful. Her blue calico, faded to a softness suited to old pictures, answered the blue of her eyes. The wistful look of her face had deepened. It was all over a gentle interrogation of sweet patience and unrest.

"So Nan came over," he began. It seemed the only way to pierce her reserve, at once, by a straight shaft. "You wouldn't do what she wanted you to."

She shook her head.

"Why wouldn't you?" he urged, and then she did answer, not ungraciously, but with a shy courtesy:

"I didn't feel to."

"It would be"—he hesitated for a word and found an ineffectual one—"nice, if you could talk to her. She wouldn't tell."

"I don't," said Tira, still with the same gentle obstinacy, "hold much with talkin'."

Raven, because he had her to himself and the time was short, determined not to spare her for lack of a searching word.

"Tira," he said, and she smiled a little, mysteriously to him but really because she loved to hear him use her name, "things aren't getting any better here. They're getting worse."

"Oh, no," she hastened to say. "They're better."

"Only last night you had to run away from him."

"Things are ever so much better," said Tira, smiling at him, with a radiance of conviction that lighted her face to a new sort of beauty. "They're all right. I've found the Lord."

What could he say? Old Crow had besought him, too, to abandon fear in the certainty of a safe universe speaking through the symbols man could understand. He tried to summon something that would reach and move her.

"What if I were drowning," he said. "Suppose I knew I should"—he sought for the accepted phrase—"go to heaven, if I drowned. Do you think I should be right in not trying to save myself?"

Tira knit her brows. It was only for an instant, though.

"No," she said. "Certain you'd have to save yourself. You'd have to try every way you knew. That's what I've done. I'm tryin' every way I know."

"I'm telling you another way," said Raven sharply. "I'm telling you you can't live with a crazy man——"

"Oh, no," she interrupted earnestly. "He ain't that. He has spells, that's all."

"I'm not even asking you to go away with me. I'm asking you to go with that good woman over there." Somehow he felt this was more appealing than the name of Nan. "I trust her as I do myself, more than myself. It's to save your life, Tira, your life and the baby's life."

She was looking at him out of eyes warm with the whole force of her worshiping love and gratitude.

"No," she said softly. "I can't go. I ain't got a word to say ag'inst her," she added eagerly. "She's terrible good. Anybody could see that. But I can't talk to folks. I can't let 'em know. Not anybody," she added softly, as if to herself, "but you."

Raven forbade himself to be moved by this.

"Then," he said, "you'll have to talk to other folks you may not like so well. I shall complain of him. I shall be a witness to what I've seen and what you've told me. I've threatened you with that before, but now it's got to be done."

"No," said Tira, trying, he could see, through every fiber of will in her to influence him. But never by her beauty: she was game there. "You wouldn't tell what I've said to you. You couldn't. 'Twas said to you an' nobody else. It couldn't ha' been said to anybody else on this livin' earth."

Here was a spark of passion, as if she struck it out unknowingly. But he must not be moved, and by every means he would move her.

"What is there," he said, in the roughness of an emotion she saw plainly, "what is there I wouldn't do to save your life? To save you from being knocked about, touched"—he was about to add "violated," the purity of her seemed so virginal, but he stopped and she went on:

"It's just as I told you before. If they asked me questions, I should say 'twa'n't so. I should say you thought 'twas so, but 'twa'n't. I should say you wrote books an' you got up things, I guessed. It made you wrong in your head."

Old Crow! The innocent observers of his life and Old Crow's were in a mysterious conspiracy to prove them both unsound. He laughed out suddenly and she looked at him, surprised.

"Do you know why I would?" she continued earnestly. "Because he never'd overlook it in this world. If they hauled him up before a judge, an' you testified, the minute they let him go he'd take it out o' you. You'd be in more danger'n I be now. Besides, I ain't in any danger.

I tried it this mornin' an' I found out." He sat with knitted brows and dry lips waiting for her to go on. "Last night," she said, "after you went down from the shack, I couldn't sleep. I never closed my eyes. But I wa'n't lonesome nor afraid. I was thinkin' o' what you said. He was there. Jesus Christ was there. An' I knew 'twas so because you said so. Besides, I felt it. An' 'long about three I got up an' covered the coals an' took baby an' come down along home. For, I says, if He was there with me in the shack, He'll go with me when I go, an' my place is to home. An' there was a light in the kitchen, an' I looked in through the winder an' Isr'el was there. He was kneelin' before a chair, an' his head was on his hands an' through the winder I heard him groan. An' I stepped in an' he got up off his knees an' stood lookin' at me kinder wild, an' he says: 'Where you been?' An' I says: 'No matter where I been. Wherever I been He's come home with me.' An' he says, 'He? Who is it now?' An' I felt as if I could laugh, it was so pleasant to me, an' seemed to smooth everything out. An' I says, 'Jesus Christ. He's come home with me.' An' he looked at me kinder scairt, an' says: 'I should think you was out o' your head.' An' I went round the room an' kinder got it in order an' brashed up the fire an' he set an' looked at me. An' I begun to sing. I sung Coronation—it stayed in my mind from the meetin'—I dunno when I've sung before—an' he set an' watched me. An' I got us an early breakfast an' we eat, but he kep' watchin' me. I'd ketch him doin' it while he stirred his tea. 'Twas as if he was afraid. I wouldn't have him feel that way. You don't s'pose he is afraid o' me, do you?"

This she poured out in a haste unlike her usual halting utterance. But there was a steadiness in it, a calm. He shook his head.

"No," he said. "I wish he were afraid of you." He wanted to leave her the comfort of belief and at the same time waken her to the actual perils of her life. "Tira," he said, looking into her eyes and trying to impress her with the force of his will, "he isn't right, you know, not right in his head, or he never would behave to you as he does. Any man in his senses would know you were true to him. He doesn't, and that's why he's so dangerous."

A convulsive movement passed over her face, slight as a twitching of muscles could well be. The sweat broke out on her chin.

"No," she said, "any man wouldn't know. Because it's true. That man that come into this house last night an' set down side o' me—an' glad enough he was there happened to be that chair left, same as if I'd left it for him—he's bad all through, an' every man in this township knows it, an' they know how I know it, an' how I found it out." The drops on her forehead had wet the curling rings of her hair and she put up her hand and swept them impatiently away. Her eyes, large in their agonized entreaty, were on Raven's, and he suffered for her as it was when he had seen her at the moments of her flight into the woods. And now he seemed to see, not her alone, but Nan, not a shred of human pathos that had been tossed from hand to hot hand, but something childlike and inviolate. And that was how he let himself speak.

"But, dear child," he said, "Tenney knows how faithful you are. He knows if you hadn't loved him you wouldn't have married him. And he knows if you love anybody, you're true through everything."

"That's it," she said loudly, in a tone that echoed strangely in the great kitchen. "That's it."

He knew what she meant. If she loved the man, she could convince him, mad as he was. But she did not love

him. She was merely clinging to him with all the strength of her work-toughened hands.

"But talk to him," he insisted. "Show him how well you mean toward him."

"I can't," she said. "I never've talked to anybody, long as I lived. I git"—she paused for a word and ended in a dash: "I git all froze up."

She sat staring at him, as if her mind were tied into knots, as if she could neither untie them, nor conceive of anybody's doing it. But he could not know just what sort of turmoil was in her nor how it was so strange to her that she felt no mental strength to meet it. In the instinct to talk to him, that new impulse born out of the first human companionship she had ever had, she felt strange troubles within her mind, an anguish of desire, formless and untrained. She was like a child who stretches out arms to something it dearly longs for and finds its fingers will not close on it. She had never, before knowing him, felt the least hunger to express anything that did not lie within the small circle of her little vocabulary. But her mind was waking, stretching itself toward another mind, and suffering from its own impotence.

"O God!" she said, in a low tone, and then clapped her hand over her mouth, because she had not meant to speak that name.

There came a knock at the door. Instantly the look of life ebbed from her face. It assumed at once its mask of stolid calm. She got up and went to the door and Raven, waiting for her to come back, remembered absently he had heard the clang of bells. Visualizing her face as she had talked to him, trying to understand her at every point, the more as she could not explain herself, he was suddenly and sharply recalled. He heard her voice.

"No," she cried, so distinctly that the sound came

through the crack of the door she had left ajar. "No, no, I tell you. You never've stepped foot into this house by my will, an', so long as I'm in it, you never shall."

Raven rose and went to the door. He had not stopped to think what he should find, but at least it was, from her tone, a menace of some sort. There stood Eugene Martin, in his fur coat, his florid extravagance of scarf and pin, on his face the ironic smile adapted to his preconceived comedy with Tira. Martin, hearing the step behind her, started, unprepared. He had passed Tenney, slowly making his way homeward, and counted on a few minutes' speech with her and a quick exit, for his butt, the fool of a husband, to see. But as Raven appeared, the fellow's face broke up in a flouting amusement. Here was another, the satiric lips were ready to swear. Deepest distrust of Tira shone forth in the half smile; a low community of mean understanding was in his following glance at Raven. He burst into a loud laugh, took off his hat and made Tira an exaggerated bow.

"Don't mention it," he said. "Didn't know you had company. Wouldn't think o' comin' in."

He turned away, his shoulders shaking with ostentatious mirth. It was all in a minute, and Raven's following act, quite unreasoned, also occupied a minute. He put Tira aside, stepped out after Martin and walked behind him down the path. When Martin reached the sleigh, Raven was at his side. Martin had ceased shaking his shoulders in that fictitious mirth. Now in that last moment, it seemed, he took cognizance of Raven, and turned, apprehension, in spite of him, leaping to his face. Raven, still with no set purpose, grasped him by the collar with one hand and with the other reached for the whip in the sleigh. It was over quickly. Raven remembered afterward that the horse, startled by the swish of the blows,

jumped aside and that he called out to him. He did not propose depriving Martin of the means of exit. The fellow did not meet judgment lying down. He did a wild feat of struggling, but he was soft in every muscle, a mean antagonist. The act over, Raven released him, with an impetus that sent him staggering, set the whip in the socket and turned back to the house. At that moment he saw Tenney coming along the road, not with his usual hurried stride, but slowly, his head lifted, his eyes upon the figures at his gate. Raven recoiled from the possibility of a three-cornered wrangle when Tenney also should reach the scene. It was an impossible predicament. Not for himself: he was never troubled by any hampering sense of personal dignity, but for Tira, who stood in silence watching them. She had advanced a few steps into the snowy path and waited, immovable, the light breeze lifting her rings of hair. To Raven, in the one glance he gave her, she was like a Fate, choosing neither good nor ill, but watching the even course of time. If Martin saw Tenney, he was not going to linger for any problematic issue. He stepped into the sleigh and, without drawing the fur robe over his knees, took up the reins. His face, turned upon Raven, was distorted with rage.

"That's assault," he called to him, "assault an' battery. I'll have the law on you an' she's my witness."

"Stop!" called Tira. She came down the path with long strides, her garments blowing back. At three paces from the sleigh she halted and called to him in a voice so clear and unrestrained that Raven thought Tenney, coming on with his jerky action, might also have heard it.

"You stir a step to git the law on him an' I'll tell what I know. What did I find out about you? The money stole out o' the box after they had the raffle for the War, the deed under old lady Blaisdell's feather bed, because it

wa'n't recorded an' it left you with the right an' title to that forty feet o' land. Five counts!" She held up her left hand and told off one finger after the other. "I've got 'em all down in my mind, an' there they've been ever since I left you. What d' I leave you for? Not because you treated me like a dog, whenever the fit was on ye, but because you was meaner'n dirt."

He sat there, the reins gathered in his hand, staring at her, his face stiffened in a reflex of the cold passion of hers. Upon her last word, he called to the horse with an oath as if it had been the beast that offended him, turned the sleigh and drove off. Tenney, breathless, was now on the scene. His thin lips curled and drew back, the snarl of the angry feline.

"Two on ye," he said to Raven. "Come to blows over her, have ye? An' you're on top."

Raven turned to Tira.

"Go into the house," he said.

Tenney laughed. It was not the laugh of the man who had just left them. There was no light mockery in it, but a low intensity of misery, the cynical recognition of a man whose house has been destroyed and who asks his inner self how he could have expected anything different. But when he spoke it was jeeringly, to Tira.

"Go into the house," he mocked. "Didn't ye hear him? He tells ye to go into the house, into my house, so's he can fight it out ag'in same's he done with t'other one. You better go. He won't git no odds from me."

He set his dinner pail down beside him, and his hand moved a few inches along the helve of his axe. And Raven, like Tira, was sorry for him.

"No," said Tira, "I sha'n't go into the house. An' this to-do ain't so much about me as about you, Isr'el Tenney, because you're makin' a fool o' yourself. You'll

be town talk, an' you deserve to be. You've brought it on yourself."

Raven, his eyes on the man's face, saw it change slightly: something tremulous had come into it, though it might have been only surprise. The hand on the axe helve shook perceptibly. Now it looked to Raven as if it might be his turn.

"I came up here this morning," he said, "to see her." Curiously, at the moment of saying "your wife," he balked at it. He would not, even by the sanction of the word, seem to give her over to him.

"Yes," said Tenney. The lividness of anger tautened his face. "You see me off to my work. You knew you'd find her here."

"Yes," said Raven. "I knew I should find her. I had to see her alone, because I wanted to ask her to leave you, go away from here, and be safe."

Tenney stared at him. The brusque fact was too much for him. Why should Raven have told it?

"You are known," Raven continued steadily, "to abuse your wife."

Tenney's lips again curled back.

"I ain't laid a finger on her," he snarled. "Anybody but a liar 'd tell you so."

"She has told me so," continued Raven. "I came to warn her I should complain of you and have you bound over to keep the peace. She said if I did that she would refuse to testify against you. She said she would rather" —here a slight bitterness came into his voice and, for an instant, he had a foolish satisfaction in reminding Tira of her unfriendliness in blocking him—"she would rather have me considered out of my mind than let you get your just deserts."

"Ah!" snarled Tenney. "I wa'n't born yesterday."

This interchange had had on Tira all the effect Raven could have wished. She started forward a step, with a murmured sound. But Tenney was unmoved.

"Now you know," said Raven, "you're not going to tell me I'm a liar. I draw the line at that. You'll have to drop your axe—that's a cowardly streak in you, Tenney, a mighty mean streak, that axe business—and I'll give you your punishment without waiting for judge or jury."

Tenney looked down at the axe frowningly, and the hand holding it sank to his side.

"Besides saying she wouldn't testify against you," Raven continued, "she refused to leave you. She is a foolish woman, but she's like most of them. They hang on to the beast that abuses 'em, God knows why. But the rest of us won't let you off so easy. Don't think it, for a minute. The next time she's seen wandering round the woods with her baby and you after her, yelling like a catamount, you're going to be hauled up and, even if she won't testify, there's enough against you to make it go hard with you."

Tenney ceased staring at the axe and looked up at Raven. Was it hatred in the eyes? The gleam in them flickered, in a curious way, cross currents of strange light. He tried to speak, gulped, and moistened his dry lips. Then he managed it:

"What business is it o' yourn?"

"It's every man's business," said Raven. "When you began running over the woods, yelling like a catamount" —he returned to this of set purpose, because it evidently bit—"I thought it was queer, that's all. Thought you were out of your head. But it got to be too much of a good thing. And it's one thing to make yourself a laughing-stock. It's another to be indicted for murder."

"I don't," said Tenney, "stan' any man's interferin'

with me. I give ye fair warnin' not to meddle nor make."

"Then," said Raven, "we've both got our warning. I've had yours and you've had mine. You're a mighty mean man, Tenney. A mean cuss, that's what you are."

Tenney, in the surprise and mortification of this, barked out at him:

"Don't ye call me a cuss. I'm a professin' Christian."

"Stuff!" said Raven. "That's all talk. I wonder a man of your sense shouldn't see how ridiculous it is. You're not a Christian. When you stand up in meeting and testify, you're simply a hypocrite. No, I don't call you a Christian. I call you a scamp, on the way to being locked up."

Tenney's mind leaped back a space.

"You're tryin' to throw me off the track," he announced. "Ye can't do it. When I come up the road you an' Eugene Martin was out there an' you knocked him down. I see ye. You horsewhipped him. Now if it's anybody's business to horsewhip Eugene Martin, it's mine. What business is it o' yourn horsewhippin' a man that's hangin' round another man's wife unless——"

"Hold on there," said Raven. "I gave him his medicine because he was too fresh." Here he allowed himself a salutary instant of swagger. Tenney might as well think him a devil of a fellow, quick to act and hard to hold. "It happens to be my way. I don't propose taking back talk from anybody of his sort—or yours. He's a mean cuss, too, Tenney, ready to think every man's as bad as he is—a foul-mouthed fool. And"—he hesitated here and spoke with an emphasis that did strike upon Tenney's hostile attention—"he is the kind of cheap fellow that would like nothing better than to insult a woman. That

was what he sat down by your wife for, last night. That was why I made an excuse to get him away from her. I wouldn't allow him within ten feet of a woman of my own family. You ought to be mighty glad I looked out for yours."

Tenney was in a coil of doubt. Suddenly he glanced round at Tira, standing there in the path, her eyes upon one and the other as they spoke. Raven would not willingly have looked at her. He felt her presence in his inmost heart; he knew how cold she must be in the wintry air with nothing about her shoulders and the breeze strong enough to stir those rings of hair about her forehead. But she must suffer it while he raked Tenney by the only language Tenney knew.

"But here be you," cried Tenney, as if his mind, unsatisfied, went back to one flaw after another in Raven's argument. "You see me go by to my work, an' you come up here to talk over my folks behind my back an' tole 'em off to run away with you."

"I have explained all that once," said Raven. "You'll have to take it or leave it."

At that instant Tira stepped forward. She gave a little cry.

"You've hurt your foot!"

Raven's glance followed hers to the ground and he saw a red stain creeping from Tenney's boot into the snow. Tenney also glanced at it indifferently. It was true that, although the cold was growing anguish to a numbing wound, he was hardly aware of it as a pain that could be remedied. This was only one misery the more.

"Course I've hurt my foot," he said savagely. "What d'ye s'pose I come home for, this time o' day?"

"Why," said Tira, in an innocent good faith, "I s'posed you come back to spy on me."

That did take hold of him. He looked at her in an almost childish reproach. Now he put the foot to the ground—he had been, though unconsciously, easing it—but at the first step winced and his face whitened.

"God A'mighty!" Raven heard him mutter, and was glad. He seemed more of a man invoking God in his pain than in waving deity like a portent before unbelievers.

Tira had gone to him.

"You put your hand on my shoulder," she said, something so sweetly thrilling in her voice that Raven wondered how Tenney could hear it and not feel his heart dissolve into water. For himself, he was relieved at the warming tone, but it mysteriously hurt him, it seemed so horrible that all the tenderness of which it was witness had to be dammed in her with no outlet save over the child who was "not right." Tenney paid no attention to her, and Raven took him by the arm. The snow was reddening thinly and Raven could see the cut in the boot.

"Open the door," he said to Tira. "I'll help him in."

Curiously, though Tenney had forgotten the hurt except as a part of his mental pain, now that his mind was directed toward it he winced, and made much of getting to the door. Yet it seemed to be in no sense to challenge sympathy. He was simply sorry for himself, bewildered at his misfortune, and so intently was his mind set on it now that he did not seem annoyed by Raven's supporting him. Tira hurried on in advance, and when they entered she was putting wood into the stove and opening drafts, to start up the neglected fire. Raven led him to the chair by the hearth, knelt, without paying any attention to his muttered remonstrance, and, with much difficulty of frequent casements, got off the boot and the soaked stocking. It was an ugly cut. Tenney, glancing down at it, groaned and looked away, and Tira brought a pillow and tucked it

behind his head. Raven, glancing up at him, saw he was white and sick and Tira said:

"He never can stan' the sight o' blood."

Evidently the irony of it did not strike her at all, but Raven wrinkled his brows over it. He sent her here and there, for water to wash the wound and for clean cloth. He rolled a bandage and put it on deftly while Tenney stared.

"Now," said he, coming to his feet, "you'd better telephone the doctor. This is all I know."

Tira went to the telephone in the next room and Raven cleared away the confusion he had made and again Tenney watched him. At intervals he looked down at his bandaged foot as if he pitied it. Tira, having given her message, came back and reported that the doctor would be there shortly.

"Then," said Raven, "I'll be off. Telephone if you need anything. Perhaps I'd better come over anyway. He'll have to be got to bed. I'll call you up."

He felt a sudden easement of the strain between himself and Tira. Tenney himself, through his hurt, had cleared the way. Their intercourse, void of secrecy, was suddenly commonplace; at the moment there was nothing in it to light a flash of feeling. Tenney did not look at him. Then Raven, in a sudden mounting of desire to show Tira how sorry he was for her, said to her impetuously:

"I hate to leave you alone."

And again she surprised him as she had the night before in implicit acceptance of her new faith, something as tangible as divine. She spoke in a perfect simplicity.

"I ain't alone," she said.

Tenney had turned his head, to listen.

"We ain't alone, Isr'el, be we?" she challenged breathlessly.

"I dunno what you're talkin' about," said Tenney uneasily, and she laughed.

It was, Raven wonderingly thought, a light-hearted laugh, as if she had no longer anything to bear.

"Why," said she, "same as I told you. We ain't alone a minute o' the time, if we don't feel to be. He's with us, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The telephone bell rang and she went off to answer it. Tenney, as if with a hopeful conviction that another man would understand, turned his eyes upon Raven.

"What's anybody want to talk like that for?" he questioned irrepressibly.

"It's the way you talk yourself," said Raven. "That's precisely what you said last night."

"It's no kind of a way——" Tenney began, and then pulled himself up. Raven believed that he meant it was one thing to invoke the Founder of his religion in a sacerdotal sense, but not for the comforting certainty of a real Presence. "Seems if anybody's crazed. Seems if——" Here he broke off again, and Raven took satisfaction in the concluding phrase: "It's no way to talk when a man's lamed himself so's't he can't git round the room 'thout bleedin' to death."

By this Raven understood the man was, in an hysterical way, afraid of Tira and her surprising invocation. He judged things were looking rather better for her, and went off almost cheerfully, without waiting for her return.

XXVI

When Raven came to Nan's, he went in without knocking and found the house still. He called her name, and she answered from an upper distance. Presently she appeared, traveling bag in hand, and came down to him.

"You really want me, Rookie?" she asked him, pausing at the closet door where she had hung her hat and coat. "You want an unattached female, unchaperoned, very much at large?"

"I want her," said Raven, "more than anything else I'm likely to get in this frowsy world. As to chaperons, Charlotte will do very well, without legging it over here every night to keep you in countenance."

Nan put on her hat and coat, and he picked up the bag.

"Back door locked?" he asked.

She laughed.

"Yes," said she. "That shows I meant to come. Go ahead, Rookie. I'll lock this door." Mid-way down the path, she glanced at him and then ventured: "You look very much set up. What is it, Rookie? what happened?"

"The thing that's happened," asid Raven, with a little reminiscent laugh, "is that Tenney's afraid of his wife. And he's cut his foot and can't get away from her. I call it the most ironical of time's revenges I've ever had the pleasure of seeing."

He went on and told her the story of Tenney's disabled foot. Nan, listening, did not take it in.

"But I don't see," she offered, "why it makes him afraid of her."

"It doesn't. Though it makes it more difficult for him to get at her. The thing that's bowled him over is that she's taken him at his word. He's told her the Founder of his religion is everywhere present, and now she's accepted it and assumes the Presence is there in the kitchen, it scares him. He assumes she's dotty. Hence he's afraid of her. You see, Nan, the Presence he's in the habit of invoking is something he conceives of as belonging to strictly sacerdotal occasions. Really, it's a form of words. But she believes it and that, as I told you, scares him. It's like raising a ghost. He's raised it and somebody's seen it and he's scared."

"Can't the queerest things happen," Nan asked him, in a discursiveness he found nevertheless relevant, "here in New England? There isn't a human trait or a morbid outcrop but we've got it. See! Charlotte's at the window. S'pose she'll want me?"

"She'll love it," said Raven. He lifted up his voice and called and Charlotte left the window to appear at the door. "I've got her, Charlotte," said Raven. "She's going to make us a visit. Give us almond pudding for dinner, can't you?"

It was too late for that, Charlotte told him indulgently, but she guessed there'd be suthin'. She lingered in the hall while Nan took off her coat, and volunteered information about the fire being lighted in the west chamber.

"I 'most thought you'd come," she said, in a way softly confidential. "You can settle right down now, you two, an' visit."

She put a hand for an instant on Nan's shoulder and Nan felt the glow of her beneficence. Did Charlotte know what it was to her to have even one evening alone with

Rookie? Charlotte knew most things. Probably she knew that.

Nan and Raven had their noon dinner and went for a walk, up the road. That led them past Tenney's and when they reached the house Raven said:

"You wait a jiff and I'll ask how he is."

Tira came, in answer to his knock. She was gravely calm, not even disturbed in her secret mind, Raven concluded, not keyed up by inner apprehension, and keeping herself firm. Where, he wondered absently, at the same instant, did she get those clothes, blue, always worn to the exact point of soft loveliness, the very moral of her eyes? She glanced down the path at Nan, and Nan waved to her. Tira gave a serious little bow and turned her glance to Raven, who inquired:

"How's his foot?"

"It pains him a good deal," she said, with that softness he had noted in her voice while they dressed the hurt. "He has to set with it in a chair. It worries him to death not to git round."

"Good Lord!" said Raven. "You must think I'm a nice chap. Who's doing the barn work?"

"Oh," said Tira, "that's all right. I can see to that. I always do when he's gone for day's works."

"You can't water the stock."

"Oh, yes, I can." Now she smiled at him, beautifully, bewilderingly, for his kindness in asking. "I done it before dinner. That's nothin'. Besides, I like it: takes me out door."

"Don't do any more," said Raven. "We'll be over, 'long about four o'clock, Jerry or I." Then, for he had forgotten Tenney, in his awareness of her, he remembered to ask: "The doctor came, did he?"

She nodded gravely.

"Say anything?"

She shook her head, and then offered, it seemed unwillingly:

"He thought he might be laid up quite a spell."

To Raven, that seemed so desirable, that he wondered at the commiseration in her voice; evidently she could be sorry for Tenney without an admixture of relief at having him safely fettered for a while.

"Well," he said, "I'll be over. And if there's anything ——" he stopped and looked her in the eyes, gravely authoritative. It was the first time their two inner selves had met in such unrestrained interchange. If there was anything he could do for her, the glance said, she was to know he would do it, to the very limit of allegiance. What did her own glance say? Was there acceptance in it? Not so much that as a grave understanding and gratitude. He was her refuge, her strength. She might still go winging brokenly about the obscurity that made her life, but he was the shelter where she might take cover if she would. Their gaze broke (it was locked there an instant only) and however she felt in turning from him, Raven had the sensation of dragging his eyes away.

"I'll be over," he said, "in time to fodder and milk."

He was leaving, but she called after him:

"No, don't you come. You send Jerry."

"I can do it as well as Jerry," he answered impatiently, and again she called:

"No, don't you come. I don't think best."

Immediately Raven knew, if she put it in that tone (the mother tone it was) he himself didn't "think best." He joined Nan and they walked on, not speaking. Suddenly he stopped for an instant, without warning, and she too stopped and looked at him. He took off his hat and was glad of the cold air on his forehead.

"Mystery of mysteries!" he said. There was bitterness in his tone, exasperation, revolt. Evidently he saw himself in a situation he neither invited nor understood. "Who'd think of finding a woman like that on a New England doorstep talking about foddering the cows?"

Nan considered the wisely circumspect thing to say and managed tamely:

"She's a good woman."

They went on.

"Yes," said Raven, after a while, "she's a good woman. But does she want to be? Or isn't there anything inside her to make her want to be anything else?"

"I have an idea," said Nan, going carefully, "most of the men she's known have wanted her to be something else."

"Now what do you mean by that?" said Raven irritably. "And what do you know about it anyway? You're nothing but a little girl."

"You keep saying that," said Nan, with composure, "because it gives you less responsibility."

He stared at her, forgetting Tira.

"Responsibility?" he repeated. "What responsibility is there I don't want to take—about you?"

"You don't want me to be a woman," said Nan. "You want me to be a little girl, always adoring you, just enough, not too much. You've been adored enough by women, Rookie."

They both knew she was talking in a hidden language. It was not women she meant; it was Aunt Anne.

"But," said she, persisting, "I'm quite grown up. I've been in the War, just as deep as you have, as deep as Dick. I've taken it all at a gulp—the whole business, I mean, life, things as they are. I couldn't any more go

back to the Victorian striped candy state of mind I was taught to pattern by than you could yourself."

"You let the Victorians alone," growled Raven. "Much you know about 'em."

"They were darlings," said Nan. "They had more brains, any ten of 'em, than a million of us put together. But it does happen to be true they didn't see what human nature is, under the skin. We do. We've scratched it and we know. It's a horrible sight, Rookie."

"What is it?" said Raven. "What is under the skin?"

Nan considered.

"Well," she said finally, "there's something savage. Not strong, splendid savage, you know, but pretending to be big Injun and not fetching it. Wearing red blankets, and whooping, and tearing raw meat. O Rookie, how do folks talk? I can't, even to you. But the world isn't—well, it isn't as nice as I thought it: not so clean. You ought to know. You don't like it either."

"So," said Raven, meditatively, "you don't like it."

"It's no matter whether I like it or not," said Nan, in a chilly way he interpreted as pride. "I'm in it. And I'm going to play the game."

They went on for a while without speaking, and then Raven looked round at her, a whimsical look.

"So you give notice," he said, "you're grown up."

"I give notice," said Nan tersely. "I'm a very old lady really, older than you are, Rookie." Then she judged the moment had come for setting him right on a point that might be debatable. "If you think I was a little girl when I sat there and loved you the other night, you might as well know I wasn't. And I wasn't a woman either: not then. I was just a person, a creatur', Charlotte would say, that wanted you to get under your tough lonesome old hide there's somebody that loves you to

death and believes in you and knows everything you feel."

"Am I lonesome, Nan?" he asked quickly, picking out the word that struck him deepest. "I don't know."

"I do," said Nan. "You haven't had any of the things men ought to have to keep them from growing into those queer he-birds stuck all over with ridiculous little habits like pin feathers that make you want to laugh—and cry, too. Old bachelors. Lord!"

"Look out," said Raven. "You'll get me interested in myself. I've gone too far that way already. The end of that road is Milly and psycho-analysis and my breaking everybody's head because they won't let me alone."

"Break 'em then," said Nan concisely. "And run away. Take this Tira with you and run off to the Malay Peninsula or somewhere. That sounds further away than most places. Or an island: there must be an island left somewhere, for a homesick old dear like you."

"Now, in God's name," said Raven, "what do you say that for?"

"Tira?" Nan inquired recklessly. "What do I tell you to take her for? Because I want to see you mad, Rookie, humanly mad. And she's got the look that makes us mad, men and women, too."

"What is it?" Raven asked thickly. "What is the look?"

"Mystery. It's beauty first, and then mystery spread over that. She's like—why, Rookie, she's like life itself—mystery."

"No," said Raven, surprising her, "you're not a little girl any more: that's true enough. I don't know you."

"Likely not," said Nan, undisturbed. "You can't have your cake and eat it. You can't have a little Nan begging for stories and a Nan that's on her job of seeing

you get something out of life, if she can manage it, before it's too late."

There she stopped, on the verge, she suddenly realized, of blundering. He was not to guess she had too controlling an interest in that comprehensive mystery which was his life. How horrible beyond measure if she took over Aunt Anne's frantic task of beneficent guidance! Rookie should be free. He began to laugh, and, without waiting for the reason, she joined him.

"Maybe I will," he said, "the Malay prescription, half of it. But I should want you with me. You may not be little, but you're a great Nan to play with. We won't drag Tira's name into it," he added gravely. "Poor Tira's name! We'll take good care of it."

"Oh, I'll go," said Nan recklessly. "But we'll take Tira. And we'll build her a temple in a jungle and put her up on a pedestal and feed her with tropical fruits and sit cross-legged before her so many hours a day and meditate on her mystery."

"What would she say?" Raven wondered, and then laughed out in a quick conviction. "No, she wouldn't say anything. She'd accept it, as she does foddering the cows."

"Certainly," said Nan. "That's Tira."

"You've forgotten the baby."

"Yes," said Nan, soberly. "Poor little boy!"

They were serious and could play no more, and presently turned into the back road and so home. At supper they had a beautiful time, the lights soft, the fire purring, and the shades up so that the cold austerities of night could look in without getting them. Nan had done a foolish thing, one of those for which women can give no reason, for usually they do not know which one it is out of the braided strands of all the reasons that make emo-

tion. She had unearthed a short pink crêpe frock she used to wear in her childish days, and let her heavy hair hang in two braids tied with pink ribbons. Did she want to lull Rookie's new-born suspicion of her as a too mature female thing, by stressing the little girl note, or did she slip into the masquerading gown because it was restful to go back the long road that lay between the present and the days when there was no war? Actually she did not know. She did know she had flown wildly "up attic," the minute Rookie announced the daring plan of the visit, and flung open chest after chest, packed by Aunt Anne's exact hands, with this and that period of her clothes. Why had Aunt Anne kept them, she straightened herself to wonder, at one point, throwing them out in a disorderly pile, ginghams, muslins, a favorite China silk. Could it be Aunt Anne had loved her, not so much as she loved Rookie, but in the same hidden, inflexible way, and wanted to preserve the image of her as she grew to girlhood, in the clothes she had worn? It was not likely, she concluded, and was relieved to dismiss even the possibility. It would have made too much to live up to, a present loyalty of obedience which, if Aunt Anne in the heavenly courts had anything like her earthly disposition, would be the only thing to satisfy her. Nan didn't mean to do anything definitely displeasing, especially to Aunt Anne. She simply meant to enjoy to the full the ecstasy of living, just as if it were going on for a lifetime, under the same roof with Rookie and having him all to herself. Then she came on the pink crêpe, with its black bows, and gave a tiny nod of satisfaction there in the attic dusk, and was all in a glow, though it was so cold.

When she came down to supper that night, Raven was reading his paper by the fire. He glanced up as if she came in so every night, Nan thought. She liked that.

But she was a little awkward, conscious of her masquerade and so really adding to the illusion of girlhood, ill used to its own charm. Raven threw down his paper and got up.

"Lord!" said he. "Come here, you witch. Let me look at you."

Nan was actually shy now.

"Why, my darling," said Raven, in a tone so moved she was almost sorry she had brought it all about. It made too many responsibilities. Which Nan was she going to be? ("But no kissing!" she reminded herself.) "You've come back to me."

"I haven't been away," said Nan, recovering herself and treating him to a cool little nod, "not actually. Like it, Charlotte?" For Charlotte had come in with a platter, and Nan turned about, peacocking before her unsurprised gaze. "I found it up attic."

"It's real pretty," said Charlotte. "Them scant things they're wearin' now, they ain't to be thought of in the same day."

Then, having given the room a last glance (almost a caressing touch Charlotte had, a little anxious, too, because all comforts were so important) she went out, and Nan was sitting opposite Raven at the table, demure, self-contained, yet playing her wildest. It was a game she knew she was to have entirely alone. The game was that she and Rookie were living here in this house in some such potency of possessive bliss that nothing could separate them. She was careless over the terms of it. She was a child, she was a woman, she was everything Rookie wanted her to be. Here they were together, and the universe, finding the combination, Nan and Rookie, too strong to fight against, had given up the losing battle, turned sulkily and left them alone.

They were hungry and in high spirits, and they ate and talked a great deal. Nan meant to remember what they talked about. Even the words were so dear to her she would have liked to set them down in a book to keep for her old age that was to be as desolate as Aunt Anne's. But it shouldn't be as conventional. There should be waves on that sea. Then Charlotte had come in to clear the table and afterward, by Raven's invitation, sat ten minutes or so by the fire and talked of neighborhood things, and they were left alone again, and he was suddenly grave. Was the game over, Nan wondered, and then went on into a more unbridled speculation whether he was finding himself reminded of the old scruples, the old withholdings when Aunt Anne, unable to keep up with their galloping horses of fun, restrained them delicately but with what a hand of steel! And suddenly she realized he was not thinking of her. Was the grim house over the rise of the road calling to his anxious heart?

"Nan," he said, as if he had suddenly made up his mind, "I've got something to show you."

He left the room and she heard him running upstairs. Presently he was back, carrying the mottled book. Instantly it had a vivid interest for her, he held it so reverently and, it seemed, so tenderly. She was at the fire and he told her to get up and take the other chair. It would bring the light at her back. With the book still in his hand, he sat down before the fire and began to tell her the story of Old Crow. Nan had known it, in its outer eccentricities; but had Old Crow been unhappy? That was new to her. She had heard of him as queer, the country oddity who, being frenzied over God or love, had madly incarcerated himself in the loneliness of his own eccentricity.

"At odds with life as he found it," Raven concluded,

"not actually able to bear it. That's how it looked to the rest of us. Now, this is how it looked to him."

"Is it a journal?" Nan asked.

She had forgotten her game. She was no child now, but a serious woman with an intensely frowning glance.

"Yes. This is his journal. Want to read it, or me read it to you?"

"Oh, you," said Nan.

"I'd better, I guess. His punctuation's queer, and so's his spelling sometimes. But I wish I could write as good a fist."

So he began. Nan sat perfectly still while the reading lasted. Once getting up to tend the fire, she went back to a higher chair and sat tense, her hands clasped about her knees. Old Crow seemed to have entered the room, a singularly vital figure with extraordinary things to say. Whether you believed the things or not, you had to listen, Old Crow believed them so tremendously. He was like a shock, an assault from the atmosphere itself. He affected Nan profoundly. Her perched attitude in the chair was, in an unreasoned way, her own tribute of strained attention. She was not combating him, but she had to tune herself up high not to be overwhelmed. When Raven had finished, he turned and laid the book on the table behind him, but lingeringly as if, Nan thought, he had an affection for it.

"Well," he asked, "what do you think?"

XXVII

"What do I think?" Nan repeated. "About Old Crow, or his religion? It is that, isn't it, Rookie? It is a religion."

"It's a religion, all right," said Raven. "And curiously, Nan, it's given me a tremendous boost."

"Because you think——"

"Not because I think anything. I've an idea that with religions you'd better not think. You'd better believe."

"If you can," said she.

"But don't you believe?" he asked her, out of an impetuosity like her own. "I never thought to wonder what you believed. I remember though, one time."

"Yes," said Nan. A deeper red ran into her cheeks, and her brows came down a little over her eyes. Raven could see she was visualizing something. "You're going back to the time when I wouldn't be confirmed."

"I remember. Mighty disagreeable, that was."

"Yes. I was in disgrace. She looked at me as if she'd been frozen. And you brought me a peach. Do you remember that peach?"

He shook his head. But he did remember, though he said nothing, his mind on the poor little girl chilled by Aunt Anne's frozen look.

"It was the most beautiful peach," said Nan, looking into the fire, and continuing to hug her knees. "It wasn't that I didn't have peaches. There were plenty to be eaten like a lady with a silver knife, or even stolen off the

sideboard and gobbled in the garden with the juice squshing over your white frock. But this one—you slipped it into my hand and I knew it was because you were sorry for me. And I took it out of the room and went into the garden with it. And what do you s'pose I did then, Rookie?"

"Ate it, I hope," said Raven. He felt his eyes hot with angry sorrow over her. "That's the only thing I know of to do with a peach."

"I went round behind the lilacs, where the lily bed is, and stood there and cried like—like a water spout, I guess, and I kissed the peach. I kissed it and kissed it. It was like a rough cheek. And then I buried it among the lilies because the dirt there looked so soft."

"Did it come up?"

He wanted, though so late, to turn it into childish comedy. Nan laughed out.

"No," she said ruefully, "not the way you'd expect. It did come up. I saw her troweling there the next morning. She'd called me to bring her other gardening gloves. She'd found a hole in one she had on. You know how exquisitely she kept her hands. And just as I came, she turned up the peach, and looked at it as if it had done something disgraceful to get there, and tossed it into her basket."

"Now," said Raven, "you can't make me think anybody"— he couldn't allow himself to say Aunt Anne— "went hunting out your poor little peach."

"No," said Nan, bending on him a limpid gaze. "Of course not, consciously. Only there was something——" But even she, with all her recklessness, could not follow this out. In her own consciousness was the certainty that deep in Aunt Anne, deep as the principle of life itself, was an intuition which led her will to the evidence it

needed for its own victories. "And the queer thing about it was," she ended, "I didn't refuse to be confirmed because I doubted things. I refused because I believed. I believed in God; I believed so hard I was afraid."

"What of?"

"Afraid of standing in with what I didn't like. Afraid I couldn't carry it through, and if I didn't, there'd be ginger for me somewhere. So queer, Rookie, like all the things that keep happening to us. Little ironies, you know, that sort of thing. For she thought I was behaving shockingly toward God. And really, Rookie, it was because I was so afraid of Him. I believed in Him so much I couldn't say I believed in a way I didn't."

"Like Old Crow," said Raven. "Only you didn't go far enough. You didn't say it's only a symbol."

"I tried not to think much about it, anyway," she owned. "I couldn't believe what she did. But I couldn't go into it. I can't now. Don't you know, Rookie, there are things you can't talk about? It's bad manners."

"I wish the learned divines thought so," said Raven. "Dear Nan!" he added, his mind returning to her. "I didn't know you so very well, after all. I must have seen you were having a beast of a time, or I mightn't have butted in with the peach, but I didn't know how deep it went."

"Oh, it always goes deep with children," said Nan, carelessly, as if the child he was pitying being snowed under by the years, it made no great difference about her, anyway. "You get gashed to the bone and the scars are like welts. But so far as I see, it has to be, coming into a world you don't even know the rules of till they're banged into you."

"You wouldn't be willing," said Raven, spurred on by a mounting curiosity over her, the inner mind of her he

seemed never to have touched before, "you wouldn't be willing to tell me what it was in the church you didn't like?"

"Yes," said Nan decisively, "I should mind. Oh, I'd tell you, Rookie, if I could anybody. But I can't. Maybe I could if I hadn't seen it working: over there, you know —seen boys clinging to it so at the end—confession—the crucifix. (The vestments, do you remember? over that faded horizon blue!) I couldn't do it, Rookie, what they did, not if I died this minute. Only," she added, struck by a thought, "I might want it to remind me. I might touch the crucifix, you know, or look at something or feel the holy water on my forehead. I might be too far gone to think up to God but—yes, it might remind me."

"Symbols," said Raven, profoundly moved by the vision of the bright spirit in her mortal beauty flickering out. "Old Crow."

"And when I said," she hesitated, anxious to give him everything he asked of her, "the things I didn't like, I meant the things they tell us, Rookie. You know: facts, details. And then you think of God and—no use, Rookie, no use!"

"Yes," said Raven, "that's where Old Crow was up against it. But picture writing, because it's the only kind of writing we can read—picture writing, Nan, because we're savages—he could take that and not wince."

"Anyway," said Nan, "I'm happiest not thinking of it. I say my prayers: God bless Rookie. God bless me. That's all."

"I don't believe it."

"Don't believe what? That I say 'God bless Rookie'? Course I do. Why not?"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Raven, at a loss. Then,

recovering himself, "Nan, I never've known you in the least. How am I getting at you now?"

"Because we're shut up here with the quiet and the snow," said Nan.

She looked at the fire, not at him. He thought, with a startled delight in her, he had never seen a more contented figure and, the beauty of it was, entirely oblivious of him. It made no demands.

"It's a fact," he reflected, "I've really never seen you since you grew up. First you were a child, then you went over there. You had to take life whole, as Old Crow took his religion."

"Yes," said Nan, "I guess we're all queer, we young ones, that have been in service. You see we've had to take things as they are. You can't veil them from us. We've seen 'em. We know." She laughed out. "Rookie, it's queer, but I'm a good deal more like the old-fashioned girl we read about than the rest of the crowd I run with."

"Why?" Raven ventured.

If Nan was in a mood to unveil her dear mind, he wanted her voice to rush on and on in that sweet staccato. And her answer was in itself surprising:

"Aunt Anne."

Raven sat looking at her, a slow smile dawning. There she was, "prim as a dish," Charlotte would say, her two braids down her back, her hands clasped about her knees. He had never, the undercurrent in his mind still reminded him, been so alone with her since the days when they had, with an unspoken sense of lawlessness, slipped away together for a day's fishing or a breathless orchid hunt in the woods. The adventures had been less and less frequent as time ran on and it had begun to dawn on Raven that they were entirely contrary to Aunt Anne's sense of New England decencies. After each occasion Nan would

be mysteriously absent for a half day, at least, and when she reappeared she was a little shyer of him, more silent toward Aunt Anne. Had she been put to bed, or shut up with tasks, to pay the tax on her stolen pleasures? He never knew. He did know, however, that when he proposed taking her off to wild delights that made her eyes glow with anticipation she always refused, unless he acceded to her plea to slip away: always to slip away, not to tell. Could it be she had known by a child's hard road to knowledge—of observation, silence, unaided conclusion—that Aunt Anne would never allow them to run away to play? Curious, pathetic, abnormal even, to have been jealous of a child! Then he pulled himself up with the shocked sense, now become recurrent, that he had never allowed himself to attack Anne's fair dignity with the weapon of unsuppressed guesswork about her inner motives. He had assumed, he had felt obliged to assume, they were as fine as her white hands. All the more reason for not assailing them now when she was withdrawn into her strange distance. Yet one source of wonder might be allowed him to explore unhindered: the presence of Nan here at his hearth, inviting him to know her to the last corner of her honest mind. She was even eager in this loving hospitality. He would hardly have seen how to define the closeness of their relation. She had turned her eyes from the fire to meet his.

"Well?" she said. "What?"

"I was thinking how queer it is," said Raven, "we never've been alone together very much—'all told' as Charlotte would say—and here we sit as if we were going to be here forever and talk out all the things."

"What things?" asked Nan.

She was not looking at him now, but back into the fire,

and she had a defensive air, as if she expected to find herself on her guard.

"Lots of 'em," said Raven. "The money." His voice sounded to her as if he cursed it, and again he pulled himself up. "What are we going to do with it?"

"Aunt Anne's," she said, not as a question but a confirmation.

"Yes. I can't refuse it. That means throwing it back on you. If I won't decide, I'm simply making you do it for me. I don't see anything for it but our talking the thing out and making up our minds together."

"No," said Nan. "I sha'n't help you."

"You won't?"

"I suppose it amounts to that."

"Now why the dickens not?"

Nan kept up her stare at the fire. She seemed to be debating deeply, even painfully.

"Rookie," she said, at last, in a tumultuous rush, "I never meant to say this. I don't know what'll come of saying it. But you've had a terrible sort of life. It's almost worse than any life I know. You've been smothered—by women." This last she said with difficulty, and Raven reddened, in a reflecting shame. "You've done what they expected you to. And it's all been because you're too kind. And too humble. You think it doesn't matter very much what happens to you."

"You've hit it there," said Raven, with a sudden distaste for himself. "It doesn't."

"And if I could clear your way of every sort of bugbear just by deciding things for you, I wouldn't do it."

"Don't try to change my destiny," said Raven, plucking up spirit to laugh at her and lead her away from this unexpected clarity of analysis that could only mean pain

for both of them. "I'm old, dear. I'm not very malleable, very plastic. We're not, at forty-odd."

"And if," said Nan deliberately, "I loved you better, yes, even better than I do (if I could!) I wouldn't tell you. It would be putting bonds on you. It would be setting up the old slavery. The more I loved you, the more I should be taking over the old tyranny: direct succession, Rookie, don't you see?"

Here she laughed, though with some slight bitterness, and he did see. Aunt Anne had ruled his life, to the drying up of normal springs in it. Nan didn't mean to accept the inheritance. He was profoundly touched, by her giving so much grave thought to it, at least.

"But, dearest child," he said, "what does it matter now? I'm rather a meager person. You couldn't dress me up with attributes, out of your dear mind. I shouldn't know how to wear 'em. I'm no end grateful to you for wanting to. But if you gave me the earth for a football now I'm too stiff to kick it. It's a curve, life is. Don't you know that? You're on the up-grade, you and Dick. I may not have got very far, but I'm on the down."

"And yet," said Nan, turning and laying a finger on the book at her side, "you can read a thing like that, a man's life turned inside out for you to see, and understand what he meant by it, and then say the game's up. You make me tired."

If he made her tired, she made him unaffectedly surprised.

"But, Nan," he said, "I didn't know you caught on so tremendously to the old chap. I didn't know it meant so very much to you."

"Of course it means things to me," she said. "Anyway, because it does to you. You came up here sick, sick at heart, sick in your mind, because you've been through

the War and you've seen what's underneath our proprieties and our hypocrisies. You see we're still in the jungle. And it's nearly killed you out, Rookie, the dear you inside you that's not at home in the jungle. You wouldn't believe me if I told you what kind of a Rookie you are. Things hurt you like blazes. And then here comes Old Crow, just as if he rose out of his grave and pointed a finger at you. And he says, 'Don't be afraid, even of the jungle.' And suddenly you weren't afraid. And now you're afraid again, and talk about downward curves, and all that. Why, Rookie, I'm older than you are, years and years."

Raven's mouth and eyes were wide open in amazement at her.

"I'm damned!" said he conversationally. "The way you young things go on. You put us in our places. Dick does, too. You've heard him. But, as I remember, then you had a tendency to choke him off."

"We won't discuss Dick," said she, again prim as a dish. "And I'm not putting you in your place because I belong to my own generation. It's only because you fill up the foreground. I have to look at you. I can't see anything else. I never could. And as a matter of fact, I don't belong to this generation. I haven't got their conceit and their swagger. Sometimes I wish I had. I can't even talk their slang. I can't smoke a cigarette."

Then Raven remembered, as if she had invited a beam of light to throw up what would appeal to him as her perfections, that she did seem to him an alien among her youthful kind, and a shy alien at that, as if she hoped they might not discover how different she was and put her through some of those subtle tortures the young have in wait for a strange creature in the herd.

"No," he said, "you're not like the rest of them. I

should have said it was because you're more beautiful. But it's something beyond that. What is it?"

"Don't you know?" said Nan, turning to him, incredulous and even a little accusatory, as if he should long ago have settled it for her doubting mind whether it was a gain for her or irreparable loss. "No, I see you don't. Well, it's Aunt Anne."

"Aunt Anne?"

"Yes. I never had the college life girls have now. When she sent me to the seminary, it was the privatest one she could find. If she could have exiled me to mid-Victorianism she would. I don't say I should have liked college life. Maybe I shouldn't. Except the athletics. Anyhow, I can hold my own there. I was enough of a tomboy to get into training and keep fit. And Rookie—now don't tell—I never do—I see lots of girls, perfectly nice girls, too, doing things Aunt Anne would have died before she'd let me do. And what do you think? I don't envy them because they're emancipated. I look at them, and I feel precisely what Aunt Anne would feel, though I don't seem to get excited about it. The same word comes into my mind, that word all the girls have run away from: unladylike! Isn't that a joke, Rookie? Charlotte would say it's the crowner."

"You're a sweet thing, Nan," said Raven, musing. He did wonder whether she was really in revolt against Aunt Anne's immovable finger.

"Smoking!" said Nan, her eyebrows raised in humorous recollection. "I used to be half dead over there, dog tired, keyed up to the last notch. You know! I'd have given a year of life for a cigarette, when I saw what the others got out of it. I was perfectly willing to smoke. I was eager to. But I'd think of Aunt Anne, and I simply couldn't do it."

Then it seemed to him that, since Aunt Anne's steel finger had resulted in such a superfine product of youth, they'd better not blame her too radically. It was her tyranny, but it was a tyranny lineally sprung from a stately past.

"I don't believe it was Aunt Anne alone," he said. "It was your remembering a rather fine inheritance. Your crowd think they're very much emancipated, but they've lost the sense of form, beauty, tradition. You couldn't go all the way with them. You couldn't be rough-haired."

"At any rate," said Nan, "I can't be young: in the sense they're young. I'm a 'strayed reveler,' that's all. But I don't know why I'm painting a Sargent portrait of me. Yes, I do. I want to squeeze everything I can out of this darling minute together, so when we don't have any more minutes I can go back to this. And you can remember, in case you ever need me, just what sort of an old Nan I am."

"And you suggest," said Raven, "my kidnaping a nice New England woman and her baby and carting them off to the Malay Peninsula."

Nan turned upon him delightedly. He could not know what he did for her by juggling the Tira myth into raillery.

"But think, Rookie," she said, "a woman so beautiful she's more than that. She's mystery. Now, isn't she beautiful?"

"Beautiful," Raven agreed, and the picture of her, madonna-like, in the woods, suddenly smote the eyes of his mind and blinded them to all but Tira.

She saw him wince, and went on more falteringly, but still determined to go all the way.

"Into a new world, Rookie, all ferns and palms."

"And snakes!"

"Perfectly honest, perfectly free, and no jungle except the kind that grows up in a night."

"And you," said Raven, "with your New England traditions and your inherited panic over a cigarette!"

They looked at each other across the length of the hearth, and it all seemed delightfully funny to them—their solitude, their oneness of mind—and they began to laugh. And at the combined shout of their merriment (almost competitive it was, in the eagerness of each to justify the particular preciousness of the moment) the door opened and Dick came in, halted, stared, in a surprise that elicited one last hoot at the unexpectedness of things, and indulged himself in a satirical comment of greeting, far from what he had intended. Poor Dick! he was always making sage resolutions on the chance of finding Raven and Nan together, but the actuality as inevitably overthrew him.

"Oh," said he, "that's it, is it? So I thought."

If he thought it, he was none the less unwise in saying so. He knew that, knew the effect he had produced, and yet was powerless to modify it. Nan was plainly taken aback, and she knew why. He was destroying her happy moment, snatching it out of any possible sequence of hours here with Rookie. Dick had come and he would stay. Raven read the boy's face and was bored. He had seen that look too much of late. But he rose and went forward with the appropriate air of welcome.

"Well, old boy," said he, his hand on Dick's shoulder, "why didn't you 'phone up? There'd have been something ready for you. No matter. We'll make a raid on the pantry."

"I don't want anything," said Dick morosely.

His eyes never left Nan. They traveled from her braids to her feet. Why, his angry gaze demanded, was she

sitting here in a beguiling masquerade—silly, too! The masquerade was silly. But it made her into something so unapproachable in the citadel of a childhood she had no lien on any longer that his heart ached within him. Except for that one kiss in France—a kiss so cruelly repudiated after (most cruelly because she had made it seem as if it were only a part of her largess to the War) he had found little pleasure in Nan. Yet there could be such pleasure with her. The generous beauties of her mind and heart looked to him a domain large enough for a life's exploring. But even the woman who had given him the kiss in France had vanished, withdrawn into the little girl Raven seemed to be forever wakening in her. He got out of his driving coat and stepped into the hall to drop it. When he came back, Nan had made room at the fire and Raven had drawn up another chair.

"Now," said Raven, "I'll forage for some grub."

At that, he left them, and Nan thought bitterly it was the cowardice of man. Dick was in the sulks and she was to suffer them alone.

XXVIII

Dick, looking down upon Nan, had that congealed aspect she alone had the present power of freezing him into. She knew all the possibilities of that face. There was the angry look: that had reigned of late when she flouted or denied him. There was the sulky frown, index of his jealousy of Rookie, and there had been, what seemed a long time ago, before they went through this disintegrating turmoil of war, the look of a boy's devotion. Nan had prized him very much then, when he was not flaunting angry rights over her. Now she sat perversely staring into the fire, realizing that everything about her angered him: the childish vanity of her dress, assumed, he would be sure, to charm the Rookie of old days into renewed remembrance. But he had to be faced finally, since Rookie was gone so long, stirring up Charlotte to the task of a cold bite, and with a little shrug she lifted her eyes to face exactly the Dick she had expected to see: dignified reproach in every line. Nice boy! she had the honest impartiality to give him that grace only to wish he would let her enjoy him as she easily could. What a team he and she and Rookie would be if they could only eliminate this idea of marriage. How they could make the room ring, here by the fire, with all the quips of their old memories. Yet wouldn't Dick have been an interruption, even then? Wasn't the lovely glow of this one evening the amazing reality of her sitting by the fire with Rookie alone for the first time in many years, and,

if he fell into the enchantment of Malaysia and the mysteries of an empty-headed Tira, the last? And now here she was dreaming off on Rookie when she must, at this very instant, to seize any advantage at all, be facing Dick. She began by laughing at him.

"Dick," she said, "how funny you are. I don't know much about Byron, but I kind of think you're trying to do the old melancholia act: Manfred or what d'you call 'em? You just stand there like old style opera, glowering; if you had a cloak you'd throw an end over your shoulder."

"Nan!" said he, and she was the more out of heart because the voice trembled with an honest supplication.

"There!" she hastened to put in, "that's it. You're 'choked with emotion.' Why do you want to sound as if you're speaking into a barrel? In another minute you'll be talking 'bitterly.' "

Dick was not particular about countering her gibes. That was unproductive. He had too much of his own to say.

"What do you suppose I'm here for?" he asked, as if, whatever it might be, it was in itself accusatory.

"Search me," said Nan, with the flippancy he hated.

She knew, by instinct as by long acquaintance, that one charm for him lay in her old-fashioned reticences and chiefly her ordered speech. Almost he would have liked her to be the girl Aunt Anne had tried to make her. That, she paused to note, in passing, was part of the general injustice of things. He could write free verse you couldn't read aloud without squirming (even in the company of the all-knowing young), but she was to lace herself into Victorian stays.

"I suppose," said she, "you came to see whether I

mightn't be having the time of my life sitting here with Rookie by the fire."

"I did," he frankly owned. "Mother said you'd gone to New York. So she went on."

"Now what the dickens for? Haven't I a perfect right to go to New York without notice?"

"Why," said Dick, "you'd disappeared. You'd gone away from here, and you were lost, virtually lost. You weren't anywhere."

"If she thought I was in New York, why didn't that settle it? What did she have to go trailing on after me for?"

"Because," said Dick, "we didn't know. She wanted to telephone. I wouldn't let her. I couldn't have the Seaburys started up. I couldn't have you get into the papers."

"Into the papers!" said Nan. "Heavens! I suppose if I'm not in at curfew I'm to be arrested."

"I let her go," repeated Dick. "But I knew as well as I wanted to you'd doubled back here and you were with him."

"Then, for God's sake," said Nan, in a conversational tone, knowing the adjuration would be bitter to him, "if I wanted to be with him, as you put it—I'm glad I ain't a poet—why didn't you let me?"

"Because," said Dick promptly, "it's indecent."

She had no difficulty in facing him now. It was a cheap means of subjugating, but, being an advantage, she would not forego it. And, indeed, she was too angry.

"Dick," she said, "you're a sickening little whelp. More than that, you're a hypocrite. You write yards and yards of your free verse to tell us how bold and brave you are and how generally go-as-you-please we've got to be if we're going to play big Injun, and then you tell me it's

indecent to sit here with Rookie, of all people in the world. My God! Rookie!"

Again she had invoked her Maker because Dick would shiver at the impropriety. "No violence," she thought satirically, remembering he was himself the instigator of violence in verse. But Dick was sorry. He had not chosen his word. It had lain in his angry mind and leaped to be used. It could not be taken back.

"You can't deny," said he, "you are perfectly happy here with him. Or you were a minute ago before I came."

"No," said Nan, "I don't deny it. Is that indecent?"

Now she had the whip hand, for he was not merely angry: he was plainly suffering. The boyish look had subtly taken possession of his face. This was the Dick she had loved always, next to Rookie. But his following words, honest as they were, lost him his advantage of the softened look. He was hanging to his point.

"Yes," he said. "He's old. You're young. So am I. We belong together. We can be awfully fond of him. We are. But it's got to be in the right way. He could live with us. We'd simply devote ourselves to him. But Nan, the world belongs to us. We're young."

At that instant Raven came in and set down his tray. Nan glanced up at him fearfully, but it was apparent he had not heard. She was no longer angry. The occasion was too big. Dick seemed to her to be speaking out of his ignorance and not from any wilful cruelty. She got up and went to Raven, as he stood there, put her hand through his arm and smiled up at him.

"Rookie," she said, with a half laugh that was really a caress, "darlingest Rookie! Charlotte never got that supper together in the world. You did it yourself, not to disturb her. I never saw so much food at one time, in all my life."

It was a monstrous feast, bread, butter, cheese, ham: very neatly assembled, but for a giant's appetite.

"We'll all have some," sad Raven. "Draw up, old son. Nan'll butter for us.

For the first minutes it seemed to Dick he could not eat, the lump in his throat had risen so. But Nan buttered and they did eat and felt better. Raven avoided looking at them, wondering what they were quarreling about now. It must, he thought, be the way of this new generation starting out avowedly "on its own."

XXIX

The blessed diversion of eating ended, a blank moment stared them in the face. What to say next? Were Nan and Dick, Raven wondered, to go on fighting? Was it the inevitable course of up-to-date courtship? Perhaps the new generation, from its outlook on elemental things, was taking to marriage by capture, clubbing the damsel and striding off, her limpness flung over a brawny arm. It seemed to him a singularly bare, unshaded way to the rose-leaf bowers his poets had been used to sing; but undoubtedly the roads were many, and this was one. Possibly the poets wouldn't say the same now. Dick ought to know. But at least there must be no warfare here in this warm patch of shelter snatched out of the cold and dark. His hand was on Old Crow's journal, Dick's inheritance, he thought, as well as his, and now a fortunate pretext to stave off an awkward moment.

"Run over this," he said. "Nan and I've been doing it. I don't believe we're in any hurry for bed."

Dick took it, with no show of interest. How should he have been interested, forced to switch his mind from the pulsating dreams of youth to worn mottled covers?

"What is it?" he asked indifferently.

Raven was rather curious now. What impression would Old Crow make, slipping in like this, unheralded?

"Never mind," he said. "Run over it and get on to it, if you can. I'd like to know what you think."

Dick, without much heart, began to read, and Raven

lighted a pipe. First, a tribute to Nan's abstinence, he passed her the cigarettes, and when she shook her head, smiled back at her, as if he reminded her of secrets they had together. Presently she got up, and Dick, closing the book, threw it on the table.

"Bed?" Raven asked, also getting up, and Nan said good night and was gone.

The two men sat down, each with the certainty that here they were to stick until something determining had been said, Raven irritated by the prospect and Dick angrily ready.

"Well," said Raven, indicating the book, "what do you think?"

"That?" said Dick absently. "Oh, I don't know. Somebody trying to write without knowing how?"

Raven gave it up. Either he had not read far, or he had not hungered or battled enough to be moved by it.

"Now, look here," said Dick, "I may not be interested in that, but there's something I am interested in. And we've got to talk it out, on the spot."

"Well!" said Raven. He mended the fire which didn't need it, and then sat down and filled his pipe. He wasn't smoking so very much but, he thought, with a bored abandonment to the situation, gratefully taking advantage of a pipe's proneness to go out. While he attended to it he could escape the too evidently condemnatory gaze from those young eyes that never wavered, chiefly because they could not be deflected by a doubt of perfectly apprehending everything they saw.

"Now," said Dick, plunging, "what do you want to do this kind of thing for?"

"What kind of thing?" asked Raven, lighting up. "Smoke?"

Dick looked at him accusingly, sure of his own rightness and the clarity of the issue.

"You know," he said. "This business. Compromising Nan."

Raven felt that slight quickening of the blood, the nervous thrill along the spine a dog must feel when his hair rises in canine emergency. He smoked silently while he was getting himself in hand, and, in the space of it, he had time for a good deal of rapid thinking. The outrage and folly of it struck him first and then the irony. Here was Dick, who flaunted his right to leave nothing unsaid where realistic verse demanded it, and he was consigning Nan to the decorum Aunt Anne herself demanded. Was the young animal of the present day really unchanged from the first man who protected his own by a fettering seclusion, simply because it was his own? Was Dick's general revolt only the yeasty turmoil sure to take one form or another, being simply the swiftness of young blood? Was his general bravado only skin deep? Raven hardly knew how to take him. He wouldn't be angry, outwardly at least. The things Dick had said, the things he was prepared to say, he would be expected to resent, but he must deny himself. It was bad for the boy, and more, a subtle slur on Nan. They mustn't squabble over her, as if her sweet inviolateness could be in any way touched by either of them. Presently he took his pipe out, looked at it curiously as if it did not altogether please him and remarked:

"Dick, you're a fool."

"Oh, yes," said Dick, with a bitterness that curled his lip a little, "I'm a young fool, too, I suppose. Well, thank God for that. I am young, and I know it, and just what I'm getting out of it and what I've a right to get. You can't play that game with me, Uncle

Jack. You simply can't do it. The old game's played out."

"And what," said Raven mildly, "is the old game? And what's the new one going to be? You'll have to tell me. I don't know."

"The old game," said Dick, "was precisely what it was in politics. The old men made the rules and the young were expected to conform. The old men made wars and the young fought 'em. The old men lied and skulked and the young had to pull them out of the holes they got into. I suppose you'd say the War was won at Chequers Court. Well, I shouldn't. I should say it was won by the young men who had their brains blown out, and lost their eyes and their legs."

"No," said Raven quietly, "I shouldn't say the War was won at Chequers Court. We needn't fight over that. The thing that gets me is why we need to fight at all. There's been a general armistice and Eastern Europe doesn't seem to have heard of it. They go on scrapping. You don't seem to have heard of it either. You come home here and find me peaceably retired to Charlotte and Jerry and my Sabine Farm, and you proceed to declare war on me. What the devil possesses you?"

"Yes," said Dick, the muscle twitching in his lip, "I do find you here. And Nan with you."

"Dick," said Raven sharply, "we'll leave Nan out of this."

Dick, though the tone was one that had called him to attention years ago, told himself he wasn't afraid of it now. Those old bugaboos wouldn't work.

"I am going," he said, "to marry Nan."

"Good for you," responded Raven. "No man could do better."

"Do you mean to tell me," countered Dick, "you're not

bluffing? Or do you actually want to let her marry me and you—you'd continue this under my nose?"

Raven stared at him a full minute, and Dick angrily met him. "Stare away," Dick was thinking. "I'm in the right. I can look you down."

"Dick," said Raven finally, "I called you a fool. It isn't such a bad thing to be a fool. We're most of us fools, of one sort or another. But don't let me think you're a dirty-minded little cad. Now I don't want to bring Nan into this, but I rather think I've got to. What are you driving at? Come, out with it!"

To his wonderment, his pain amounting to a shock of perplexity and grief, he saw Dick's face redden and the tears spring to his eyes. How horribly the boy cared, perhaps up to the measure of Nan's deserts, and yet with what a childish lack of values! For he had no faith either in Nan or in old Jack. The ties of blood, of friendship, were not holding. He was as jealous as Othello, and no sane certainties were standing him in stead. Dick, feeling the painful tears, felt also the shame of them. He wanted to answer on the instant, now Raven had given him his chance; but so unused was he to the menace of betraying emotion that he was not even sure of not blubbering like a boy. He swallowed and came out with it:

"You've got some sort of hold on her nobody else has. You've hynotized her. She eats out of your hand."

Raven, in despair, sat looking at him. He ought, he felt, to be able to laugh it all away, but he was too bewildered and too sorry.

"Dick," said he finally, "I shall have to say it again. You're an awful fool. Nan and I were always the best of friends. I rather think I have known her in a way none of the rest of you have. But—hypnotized her! Look at me, Dick. Remember me plodding along while

you grew up; think what sort of a chap I am. You won't find anything spectacular about me. Never has been, never will be. And Nan, of all people! little Nan!"

Dick forgot the imminence of a breaking voice and humid eyes. Raven, he felt, wasn't playing the game. He was skulking out of it.

"Do you deny," he said, in a voice so loud and hoarse that it startled him as it did Raven, "that you're in love with her?"

"Good God!" said Raven. He rose, laid his pipe on the mantel and stood, trembling, even in his clenched hands. "What is there to answer," he got out at length, "to a question like that? You've just reminded me I'm past my youth. Why don't you remember it yourself when it'll do you some good? I'm an old chap, and you——"

"You're as fit as ever you were in your life," said Dick, as if he grudged it to him. "And more fascinating, I suppose, to a girl like her. There's something pathetic about it. It's half pity, too! Nothing so dangerous in the world."

Raven swung round, walked to the window and, hands in his pockets, stood looking out. In love with Nan! well, he did love Nan better than any created thing. All the old tests, the old obediences, would be nothing to him if he could consecrate them to Nan, her happiness, her safety in this dark world. How about his life? Yes, he would give that, a small thing, if Nan needed the red current of it to quicken her own. But "in love" as Dick understood it! If you were to judge Dick's comprehension of it from his verse, love was a sex madness, a mortal lure for the earth's continuance, by the earth begot. And who had unconsciously held out that lure to him but the woman of

mystery up there on the road in that desolate house with her brutal husband and her deficient child? He had seen the innocent lure, he had longed to put out his hand to the hand unconsciously beckoning. Through the chill wintry night the message came to him now. And only Nan could understand that the message might come and that it was a part of the earth and to be forgotten, like a hot wind or a thrilling song out of the dark—Nan, his darling, a part of him, his understanding mind, as well as the fiber of his heart. Suddenly he turned on Dick who was watching him, ready, it seemed, to pounce on his first change of look.

"Dick," he said, "I adore Nan."

"Yes," said Dick, "I know you do. I told you——"

"But," broke in Raven, "you don't know anything about it."

"Oh," said Dick, "then I don't adore her, too."

Raven reflected. No, his inner mind told him, there was no community of understanding between them. How should Dick traverse with him the long road of rebuff and downfall he had traveled? How should youth ever be expected to name the cup it has not tasted? For Dick, he thought again, what is known as love was a simple, however overwhelming, matter of the mounting blood, the growing year. For him it would be the ashes of forgotten fire, the strange alembic mixed of bitter with the sweet. In that moment he faced an acknowledged regret that he had not lived the normal life of marriage at the start, the quieting of foolish fevers, the witness of children. We are not, he reflected, quite solvent unless we pay tribute before we go. He mused off into the vista of life as it accomplishes itself not in great triumphal sweeps, but fitful music hushed at intervals by the crash of brutal mischance, and only, at the end, a solution of broken chords.

Meantime Dick watched him, and Raven at last, feeling the boy's eyes on him, came awake with a start.

"Yes, Dick," he answered gently, "of course you love her. And it ought to do you good. It's a big thing to love Nan."

"Very well then," said Dick, his voice trembling a little in answer to that gentler tone, "you let her alone, can't you? Nan's a different girl when she's with you. It's no use denying it. You do hynotize her."

"Dick," said Raven, "that's a beastly thing to say. If you mean it to be as offensive as it sounds, you ought to be booted for it."

"Oh," said Dick, with a simple certainty in what he knew, "I don't blame you as I should any other fellow that wasn't going through what you are. That would be a simple matter to deal with: a chap that knew what he was doing. You don't, old man. You may not know it, but you don't."

"For the land's sake!" said Raven, echoing Charlotte, "And what, again for the land's sake, am I going through?"

"You know," said Dick uneasily because he did hope to avoid putting it into words. "*Cafard.*"

Raven had one of his moments of silence, getting hold of himself, taking the matter in, with its forgotten enormity.

"So," he said, "you've adopted your mother's word for it. I hadn't realized that."

"Oh, Mum's no such fool," said Dick. "She may be an aggravation and a curse—I'll own that—but she's up to date. Why, Jack, anybody that ever knew you'd know you're not yourself."

"No," thought Raven, "few of us are ourselves. We've been through the War, my son. So have you; but you

didn't have such a brittle old world inside you to try to put together again after it was smashed. Your inner world was in the making. Whatever you might feel in its collision with the runaway planet of the mad human mind, it could right itself; its atoms might cohere."

"You needn't think," proceeded Dick generously if a trifle too magnificently, "I can't see. There's a lot of things I see that don't bear talking about. I've pitched into you about Nan, but you needn't suppose I don't know it's all a matter of hidden complexes."

Again recurring to Charlotte in this moment of need, Raven reflected that he didn't know whether he was afoot or a-horseback.

"You don't mind, I hope," he said, with humility before this perfectly equipped intelligence, "explaining a little."

"Why," said Dick, "there's all your previous life. It's a case of inhibition. There was Miss Anne."

"Stop," said Raven, his curiosity over the boy's mind dying in a crash. "Stop right there, Dick; you're making a fool of yourself. Now we'll go to bed."

He got up and waited, and Dick, sulkily, rose too.

"You needn't think," he began, and Raven broke in:

"You needn't think I shall stand another word of your half-baked psycho-deviltries. You can believe what you like. It'll harm nobody but yourself. But you don't talk it here, or out you go. Now!"

The last word meant he was waiting to put out the light and Dick, without another look at him, strode out of the room, snatched his suit-case and went up the stairs. Raven heard the decisive click of his door and, his own heart beating in a quick response to what he knew must happen, turned on the light again and stood there silent, waiting. It did happen. A soft rustle, like a breeze blow-

ing down the stairs, and Nan came in. She had taken off her child's dress, as if to show him she had left their game behind her. The long braids were pinned up, and she wore her dark walking dress. She was paler, much older, and he was renewedly angry with Dick for banishing the Nan that was but an hour ago. Perhaps that Nan would never come back.

"Darling Rookie," she said, so softly that the sound of it could not have got half way up the stairs, "what's it all about?"

"About you, Nan," he answered, and denied himself the darling Nan he had for her. "And being in love. And Dick's wanting you."

"It's more than that," said Nan wistfully. "He's been at you somehow. He's dug ditches across your dear forehead and down your cheeks. What d'he say, Rookie? What d'you say to him?"

Raven shook his head. He had no idea of inviting her into the psycho-analytic ward of Dick's mind.

"Nan," he said, "the boy's unhappy. He's in love with you. No doubt about it."

Nan, on her part, had nothing to say to this.

"What made you change your dress?" asked Raven. "You give me a funny feeling, as if you'd put the little Nan to bed and come down here to say you're going, in a minute, and never coming back."

"I am going," said Nan, "only not in a minute. Charlotte says Jerry shall take me to the early train."

"Now, by George!" said Raven, so loudly she put her finger to her lip, "if that's what Dick's done, he shall go himself, and know the reason, too. Spoil my visit with you, break it all up? Why, I never had a visit from you before."

"It's broken," said Nan. "You couldn't put it to-

gether again." The red had come into her cheeks and her eyes showed a surface glitter he did not know. "I'm going to leave you to Tenney—and Tira—and your destiny—and Old Crow."

"Is this a part of your scheme?" asked Raven roughly. He was curiously dashed, almost shamed by her repudiating him. "You're as bad as Dick. He's been bringing all his psychopathic patter to bear on me, and you're deserting me. Oh, come! Let's be safe and sane, like the Fourth."

"So we will be," said Nan. She was retreating toward the door. There were simple natural things she wanted at that moment. She wanted to go to him, put her arms about him, mother or child arms, as he might wish, and bid him a good-by that would wrap him about like a cloak while they were absent one from the other. He should have her lips as he had her heart. Nan was an adventurer on the high seas of life. She cared very little whether her boat rode the wave or sank, so it could unload the gold and gems it carried on the sand of the world she loved. Rookie was the home of her heart. The gold was all for him. But if he did not want it—and meantime she was at the door. "Don't get up," she said, "to see me off. If you do, he will, too, and there'll be more fireworks. No, no, Rookie. Don't look like that. I'm not hateful about him, really, only he has spoiled my fun."

"Why you should go," said Raven, advancing; "why you should leave this house just because he's come!"

"No fun!" said Nan. "Do you see us, the three of us, sitting down to meals together? No, Rookie. Can't be done. Good night."

Here she did turn definitely and went up the stairs, and Raven presently followed. In his room he stood for a moment thinking, not of Dick, who was troublesome, in

an irritating way incident to biting young cubs just aware of their teeth, but of the challenge that was Nan. Here she was, all beauty, all wisdom, in the natal gifts of her, telling him, with every breath, she loved him and only him. And yet, his knowledge of life was quick to answer, it was the accretion of long hungers, the sum of all desires since she was little and consigned to Aunt Anne's delicate frigidities for nurture and, as the event proved, for penury. She had no conception of a love as irresistible as hers was now abounding. In a year or two, youth would meet her on the road of youth, and they would kiss and old Rookie would become the dim duty of remembered custom. And as he thought these things, his overwhelming revolt against earth and its cruelty came over him, and he stood there gripping his hands into their palms, again at open war with life. It was a question without an answer, a hunger unfed, a promise broken. Eternal life was the soporific distilled by man, in his pathetic cunning, to dull the anguish of anticipated death. Standing there in the silence, he felt the waves of loneliness going over him, and thought of Nan in her chamber across the hall, angelic in her compassion, her arms ready for him as a mother is ready for her child. The moonlight made arabesques on the walls, and he walked to the window with an instinctive craving for the open. He stood gripping the casing with both hands and looking up over the hillside where also the light lay revealingly. Up there was the hut where Tira might be now if Tenney had not wounded himself, fleeing in her turn from earthly cruelty. Up there Old Crow had lived in his own revolt against earth cruelty. And, with the thought, Old Crow seemed to be, not on the hillside, but beside him, reading to him the testimony of the mottled book, but more insistently, in a clearer voice. If it could be so, if God had intention, not

only toward his own colossal inventiveness, but as touching the well-being of man—yes, and of the other creatures, too, the pathetically oppressing and oppressed—if He had given man the problem with no solution indicated, to work it out as he had worked out pottery and fabrics, and light and talking over space—always in conformity to law—it was stupendous. No matter how many million men went to the building of the safeguarding reefs, no matter through what blood and tears the garden of the earth was watered if the flower of faith could grow at last.

"That is my legacy to the boy," he seemed to hear Old Crow repeating. "He must not be afraid."

And as he was sinking off to sleep he had an idea he was praying, perhaps to God; or was it to Old Crow? At any rate, he was saying:

"For God's sake look out for Nan. You don't need to make it so devilish hard for Nan."

He was downstairs early. At the foot of the stairs stood Charlotte, waiting. She looked—what? compassionate?

"She's gone," said Charlotte. "Jerry was up 'fore light."

"Gone?" echoed Raven. "At this time of day? What for? She'll have an hour to wait."

"She would have it so," said Charlotte. "She was terrible anxious to git off."

So, Raven thought, she didn't want to see either of them. She was tired of them, of him with his stiff withdrawals and Dick's young puppyhood. He ran upstairs, snatched some old riding breeches out of a closet, put them on and, without a word to Charlotte, went to the barn. But her eye was on him and she called out of the shed door:

"You took your saddle with you. Don't you know you

did? There's nothin' but your father's hangin' there, old as the hills."

Raven did not answer, or even turn his head. He went into the harness room, found the old saddle hanging in its place, led out Nellie, surprised at being expected to leave her oats, saddled her and rode away. He was angry, with Nan, with all the childish trouble of the business, and—as two neighbors agreed, seeing him gallop past—rode like the devil, yet not coming upon Nan and Jerry until they were at the station platform. Nan saw him first. She was gloriously glad, waving her hand and laughing out. Jerry stood with mouth open, silent but incurious, and Raven dismounted and threw him the reins.

"Hitch her behind," he said. "I'll go back with you. Got something extra to blanket her?"

He came up to Nan, and they took hands and went into the waiting room together. It was steaming hot from the monster stove and they retreated again to the platform.

"Come out and walk," said Raven, "up to Pine Grove. You've got an hour, you little simpleton. What did you run away for?"

The station is in a cluster of houses, awake early every morning when the milk goes away. But the road across the track leads up a little rise into Pine Grove, where church and sociables have picnics, the merrier for the neighborliness of the few trains. Raven and Nan climbed the rise almost at a run, and when they reached the shadowing pines, looked in at the pure spaces, remembering, for the first time, the snow would bar them out. They must keep to the road.

"Forty-eight minutes," said Raven. "We'll walk twenty and then cut back. Come on."

They walked a little, raced a little, talked—not much—and laughed a great deal. Raven was in the highest

spirits, sure he was sending her off happy, since she would go. Never afterward could they remember what they talked about: only it seemed a fortunate moment stolen from the penury of years. Again he took out his watch.

"Time's up!" he said, and they went back.

The station was alive with its small activities. Jerry was walking Nellie up and down. The train came in and when Nan left him Raven remembered they had not said good-by. There was a kind of permanence in it; the moment had cemented something into bonds. When she had gone he and Jerry got into the pung and drove away leading Nellie, and then Raven remembered he had not breakfasted. They talked horse all the way home, and when Dick, appearing on the porch, called to them:

"What you got Nellie for?"

Raven answered cheerfully:

"I took a notion."

Then he and Dick went in to breakfast, and Nan's name was not mentioned. Charlotte, Raven concluded, had told the boy she was gone. He seemed to detect in Dick some watchful kindness toward himself, the responsible care attendants manifest toward the incapable. Dick was, he concluded, bent on therapeutic measures.

XXX

Tira, from the forenoon of Tenney's accident, entered on uneventful days. He lowered over his helplessness; he was angry with it. But the anger was not against her, and she could bear it. For the first time she saw his activities fettered, and the mother in her answered. She ventured no outspoken sympathy, but he was dependent on her and in that, much as it chafed him, she found solace. He was chained to his chair, his wounded foot on a rest, and he had no diversions. Tira sometimes wondered what he was thinking when he sat looking out at the road, smooth with the grinding of sleds and slipping of sleighs. Once she brought the Bible and laid it before him on a stand. If its exposition was so precious to him at evening meeting, there would be comfort in it now. But he glanced at her in what looked like a quick suspicion—did it mean he thought she meant to taunt him with the unreality of his faith?—and, after it had lain there a forenoon untouched, he said to her uneasily:

"You put that away."

She took it back to its place on the parlor stand under Grandsir Tenney's hatchet-faced photograph, wondering in her heart why it was not what she had heard them read of God: "A very present help in time of trouble." If you knew it was so, Tira reasoned, you never had to fret yourself any more. And if that place was waiting for you —the good place they talked about—even a long lifetime was not too much to face before you got to it. After she

had laid the book down and turned away from it to cross the ordered stillness of the room, she stopped, with a sudden hungry impulse, and opened it at random. "Let not your heart be troubled," she read, and closed it again, quickly lest the next words qualify so rich a message. It might say further on that you were not to be troubled if you fulfilled the law and gospel, and that, she knew, was only fair. But in her dearth she wanted no sacerdotal bargaining. She needed the heavens to rain down plenty while she held out her hands to take. When she entered the kitchen again Tenney, glancing round at her, saw the change in her look. She was flushed, her mouth was tremulous, and her eyes humid. He wondered, out of his ready suspicion, whether she had seen anyone going by.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

"Nothin's the matter," she answered. But her hands were trembling. She was like Mary when she had seen her Lord.

"Who's gone by?" he persisted. "I didn't hear no bells."

"No," said Tira. "I don't believe anybody's gone by, except the choppers. It's a proper nice day for them."

The child woke and cried from the bedroom and she brought him out in the pink sweetness of his sleep, got the little tub and began to give him his bath by the fire. As she bent over him and dried his smooth soft flesh, the passion of motherhood rose in her and she forgot he was "not right," and sang a low, formless song. When he was bathed she stood him naked on her knee, and it was then she found Tenney including them both in the livid look she knew. And she saw what he saw. The child's hair was more like shining copper every day, his small nose had the tiniest curve. By whatever trick of nature, which is implacable, he was not like her, he was not like Tenney.

He was a message from her bitter, ignorant past. Her strong shoulders began to shake and her hands that steadied the child shook, too, so that he gave a little whimper at finding himself insecure.

"Isr'el," she broke out, "before God!"

"Well," said he, in the snarl she had heard from him at those times when his devil quite got the better of him, "what? What you got to tell?"

"It ain't so," she said, her voice broken by her chattering lips. "Before God, it ain't so."

"So ye know what I mean," he jeered, and even at the moment she had compassion for him, reading his unhappy mind and knowing he hurt himself unspeakably. "Ye know, or ye wouldn't say 'tain't so."

Words of his own sprang up in her memory like witnesses against him, half phrases embodying his suspicion of her, wild accusations when, like a drunken man, he had let himself go. But this he did not remember. She knew that. Shut up in his cell of impeccable righteousness, he believed he had dealt justly with her and no more. She would not taunt him with his words. She had a compassion for him that reached into his future of possible remorse. Tira saw, and had seen for a long time, a catastrophe, a "wind-up" before them both. Sometimes it looked like a wall that brought them up short, sometimes a height they were both destined to fall from and a gulf ready to receive them, and she meant, if she could, to save him from the recognition of the wall as something he had built or the gulf as something he had dug. As she sat looking at him now, wide-eyed, imploring, and the child trod her knee impatiently, a man went past the window to the barn. It was Jerry, gone to fodder the cattle, and Jerry brought Raven to her mind who, if he was obeying her by absence, was none the less protecting her. The

trouble of her face vanished and she drew a quick breath Tenney was quick to note.

"Who's that?" he asked her sharply, turning in his chair to command the other window.

"Jerry," she said. Her heart stilled, and she began to dress the child, with her mother's deftness. "He comes a little early to fodder, 'fore he does his own."

"I dunno," said Tenney, irritably because he had to wear out his spleen, "why you can't fodder the cows when anybody's laid up. There's women that do it all the time if their folks are called away."

"Why, I could," said Tira, with a clear glance at him, "only he won't let me."

"What's he got to do with it." said Tenney, in surprise. "Won't let ye? Jerry Slate won't let ye? Jerry ain't one to meddle nor make. I guess if you told him 'twas your place to do it an' you'd ruther stan' up to it, he'd have no more to say."

The blood came again to her face. She had almost, she felt, spoken Raven's name, and a swift intuition told her she must bury even the thought of it.

"There ain't," she said, "two nicer folks in this township than Charlotte an' Jerry, nor two that's readier to turn a hand."

Tenney was silent, and Jerry did the chores and went home. Sometimes he came to the house to ask how Tenney was getting on, but to-day he had to get back to his own work.

This was perhaps a week after Tenney's accident, when he was getting impatient over inaction, and next day the doctor came and pronounced the wound healing well. If Tenney had a crutch, he might try it carefully, and Tenney remembered Grandsir had used a crutch when he broke his hip at eighty-two, and healed miraculously

though tradition pronounced him done for. It had come to the house among a load of outlawed relics, too identified with the meager family life to be thrown away, and Tira found it "up attic" and brought it down to him. She waited, in a sympathetic interest, to see him try it, and when he did and swung across the kitchen with an angry capability, she caught her breath, in a new fear of him. The crutch looked less a prop to his insufficiency than like a weapon. He could reach her with it. He could reach the child. And then she began to see how his helplessness had built up in her a false security. He was on the way to strength again, and the security was gone.

The first use he made of the crutch was to swing to the door and tell Jerry he need not come again. Tira was glad to hear him add:

"Much obleeged. I'll do the same for you."

Afterward she went to the barn with him and fed and watered while he supplemented her and winced when he hurt himself, making strange sounds under his breath that might have been oaths from a less religious man. And Tira was the more patient because the doctor had told her the foot would always trouble him.

It was two days after he had begun to use his crutches, that Tira, after doing the noon chores in the barn and house, sat by the front window in her afternoon dress, a tidy housewife. The baby was having his nap and Tenney, at the other window, his crutch against the chair beside him, was opening the weekly paper that morning come. Tira looked up from her mending to glance about her sitting-room, and, for an instant, she felt to the full the pride of a clean hearth, a shining floor, the sun lying in pale wintry kindliness across the yellow paint and braided rugs. If she had led a gypsy life, it was not because her starved heart yearned the less tumultuously for order and

the seemliness of walls. For the moment, she felt safe. The child was not in evidence, innocently calling the eye to his mysterious golden beauty. Tenney had been less irascible all the forenoon because he had acquired a fortunate control over his foot, and (she thought it shyly, yet believingly) the Lord Jesus Christ was with them. Disregarded or not, in these moments of wild disordered living, He was there.

She heard sleigh-bells, and looked out. Tenney glanced up over his glasses, an unwonted look, curiously like benevolence. She liked that look. It always gave her a thrill of faith that sometime, by a miracle, it might linger for more than the one instant of a changed visual focus. She caught it now, with that responsive hope of its continuance, and knew, for the first time, what it recalled to her: the old minister beyond Mountain Brook looked over his glasses in precisely that way, kindly, gentle, and forgiving. But mingled with the remembrance, came the nearing of the bells and the shock to her heart in the man they heralded: Eugene Martin, driving fast, and staring at the house. The horse was moving with a fine jaunty action when Martin pulled him up, held him a quieting minute, and got out. He paused an instant, his hand on the robe, as if uncertain how long he should stay, seemed to decide against covering the horse and ran up the path. He must have seen Tira and Tenney, each at a window, but his eyes were on the woman only. Half way along the path, he took off his hat and waved it at her in exaggerated salute, as if bidding her rejoice that he had come. In the same instant he seemed, for the first time, to see Tenney. His eyes rested on him with a surprise excellently feigned. He replaced his hat, turned about like a man blankly disconcerted and went back down the path, with the decisive tread of one who cannot take

himself off too soon. He stepped into the sleigh and, drawing the robe about him, drove off, the horse answering buoyantly. Tira sat, the stillest thing out of a wood where stalking danger lurks, her eyes on her sewing. Tenney was staring at her; she knew it, and could not raise her lids. Often she failed to meet his glance because she so shrank, not from his conviction of her guilt, but the fear of seeing what she must remember in blank night watches, to shudder over. For things were different at night, things you could bear quite well by day. Now he spoke, with a restrained certainty she trembled at. He had drawn his conclusions; nothing she could possibly say would alter them.

"Comin' in, wa'n't he?" the assured voice asked her. "See me, didn't he, an' give it up?"

Tira forced herself to look at him, and the anguished depths of her eyes were moving to him only because they seemed to mourn over his having found her out.

"No, Isr'el," she said quietly. "He wa'n't comin' in. He drew up because he see you, an' he knew 'twould be wormwood to both of us to have him do just what he done."

Tenney laughed, a little bitter note. Tira could not remember ever having heard him laugh with an unstinted mirth. At first, when he came courting her, he was too worn with the years of work that had brought him to her, and after that too wild with the misery of revolt. She was sorry for that, with an increasing sorrow. Tira could bear no unhappiness but her own.

"Wormwood!" he repeated, as if the word struck him curiously. "D'he think 'twas goin' to be wormwood for a woman to find a man comin' all fixed up like courtin' time, to steal a minute's talk? You make me laugh."

He did laugh, and the laugh, though it might have

frightened her, made her the more sorry. She had the sense of keeping her hand on him, of holding him back from some rushing course that would be his own destruction.

"Yes," she answered steadily. "'Twould be nothin' but wormwood for me, an' well he knows it. He don't—love me, Isr'el."

She hesitated before the word, and with it the thought of Raven came to her, as she saw him, unvaryingly kind and standing for quiet, steadfast things. "He hates me."

"Hates ye," he repeated curiously. "What's he hate ye for?"

"Because," said Tira, bound to keep quietly on in this new way of reason with him, "I left him. An' I left him 'fore he got tired o' me. He never'd overlook that."

"You left him, did ye?" he repeated. "Then that proves you was with him, or ye couldn't ha' left him."

"Why, Isr'el," said she, her clear gaze on his turbid answering one, "I told you. I told you long 'fore you married me. First time you ever mentioned it, I told you, so's to have things fair an' square. I told you, Isr'el."

He said nothing, but she knew the answer at the back of his mind, and it seemed to her wise now to provoke it, to dare the accusation and meet it, not as she always had, by silence, but a passionate testimony.

"You said," she continued, "it shouldn't make no difference, what I'd done 'fore you married me. You said we couldn't help the past, but we could what's comin' to us. An' I thought you was an angel, Isr'el, with your religion an' all. Not many men would ha' said that. I didn't know one. An' we were married an' you—changed."

"Yes," he said. His hands were shaking as they did at the beginning of his rages, but Tira, embarked on a course she had long been coming to, was the more calm.

"Yes, I changed, didn't I? An' when d' I change? When that"—he paused and seemed to choke down the word he would have given the child—"when that creatur' in there turned into the livin' pictur' of the man that drew up here this day. Can you deny he's the image of him?"

"No," said Tira, looking at him squarely. "He is the image of him."

"What do folks think about it?" he asked her. "What do you s'pose the neighbors think? What'll it be when it grows worse an' worse? What'll the school children say when he's old enough to go to school? They'll see it, too, the little devils. The livin' image, they'll say, o' 'Gene Martin."

Tira laid her work on the table in front of her. The moment of restraining him had failed her, but another moment had come. This she had seen approaching for many months and had pushed away from her.

"Isr'el," she said, "I guess you won't have that to worry over. There's no danger of his goin' to school. He—ain't right."

He stared at her a long moment, puzzling instances accumulating in his mind, evidences that the child was not like other children he had seen. Then he began to laugh, a laugh full of wildness and despair.

"O my Lord!" he cried. "My Lord God! if I wanted any evidence I hadn't got, You've give it to me now. You've laid Your hand on her. You've laid Your hand on both of 'em. He can't ride by here an' see a red-headed bastard playin' round the yard an' laugh to himself when he says, 'That's mine.' You've laid Your hand on 'em."

Tira rose from her chair and went to him. She slipped to the floor, put her head on his unwelcoming shoulder and her arms about his neck.

"Isr'el," said she, "you hear to me. If you can't for

the sake o' me, you hear to me for the sake o' him,—sleepin' there, the pitifullest little creatur' God ever made. How's he goin' to meet things, as he is? 'Twould be hard enough with a father 'n' mother that set by him as they did their lives, but you half-crazed about him—what'll he do, Isr'el? What'll the poor little creatur' do?"

Tenney sat rigid under her touch, and she went on, pouring out the mother sorrow that was the more overwhelming because it had been locked in her so long.

"Isr'el, I could tell you every minute o' my life sence you married me. If 'twas wrote down, you could read it, an' 'twould be Bible truth. An' if God has laid His hand on that poor baby—Isr'el, you take that back. It's like cursin' your own flesh an' blood."

"I do curse him," he muttered. "I curse him for that—not bein' my flesh an' blood." With the renewed accusation, his anger against her seemed to mount like a wave and sweep him with it, and he shook himself free of her. "Jezebel!" he cried. "Let go o' me."

Tira rose and went back to her chair. But she did not sit down. She stood there, looking out of the window and wondering. What to do next? With a man beside himself, what did a woman do? He was talking now, drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair and looking at her.

"Sometimes," he said, "when it all comes over me, I think I'll shet you up. I'll leave him asleep in there an' lock you in, up chamber, an' you can hear him cry but you can't git to him. An' mebbe you can work it out that way. He'll be the scapegoat goin' into the wilderness, cryin' in there alone, an' you'll be workin' out your punishment, hearin' him cry."

Tira stood listening and thinking. This was a new danger. If he shut her away from the child (and he might

do it easily, when his foot would serve him again) nobody would hear. They were too far away. He was frightening her. She would frighten him. She walked up to him and stood looking down on him.

"Isr'el," said she quietly, "don't you git it into your head you could shet me up."

"Yes," said he, and his tone was as ominous as her own, "I guess I could shet you up all right."

"Yes," said Tira, "mebbe you could. But if you do, I'll break out. An' when I've broke out"—she towered over him—"I'll break your neck."

Tenney, looking up and seeing in her eyes the mother rage that sweeps creation from man to brute, was afraid, and Tira knew it. She looked him down. Then her gaze broke, not as if she could not have held his forever, but haughtily, in scorn of what was weaker than herself.

"I've been a true wife to you, Isr'el," she said. "You remember it now, 'fore it's too late. For as God's my witness, if you turn your hand ag'inst a little child—whether it's your own or whether it ain't—an' that baby in there is yourn an' no man but you has got part nor lot in him—if you turn ag'inst him, I turn ag'inst you. An' when I've done that, you'll find me as crazy as you be, an' I can't say no worse."

She went into the bedroom and he heard her crooning there, defiantly he thought, even through the low sweetness of her voice. But her passion had shaken him briefly. For the moment, the inner self in him could not help believing her. He went back to his newspaper, trying, though the print was dim before him, to recover his hold on the commonplace of the day. He, too, would be unmoved; she should see he was not afraid of her tantrums. But he had not read half a column before an evil chance

drew his eyes to a paragraph in the gossip from the various towns about. This was under the caption of his own town:

"A certain gentleman appeared last week with a black eye, gained, it is said, in a scrap with a non-resident interested in keeping the peace in country towns. It is said both combatants bore themselves gallantly, but that suit for assault and battery is to be brought by the party attacked."

Tenney sat staring at the words, and his mind told him what a fool he was. That meant the encounter at his gate. He had ignored that. He had been deflected from it simply because he had cut his foot and let himself be drawn off the track of plain testimony by his own pain and helplessness. Was Raven in it, too? Was there a shameless assault of all the men about on Tira's honesty? While he was the dupe of Martin, was Martin Raven's dupe? Did such a woman bring perpetual ruin in her path? This he did not ask himself in such words or indeed through any connected interrogation. It was passion within him, disordered, dim, but horrible to bear. He got up presently, took her scissors, cut out the paragraph and laid it on her basket where her eyes must fall upon it. When he had gone back to his chair, she appeared from the bedroom and went up to him. He did not look at her, but her voice was sweeter, gentler than the song had been, with no defiance in it, and, in spite of him, it moved his sick heart, not to belief in her, or even a momentary rest on her good intent toward him, but to a misery he could hardly face. Every nerve in him cried out in revolt against his lot, his aching love for her, his passion forever unsatisfied because she was not entirely his, the anguish of the atom tossed about in the welter of elemental life.

"Isr'el," said she, "there's one thing we forgot when we spoke so to each other as we did a minute ago."

She waited, and he looked up at her, and the hunger of his eyes was as moving to her as if, like the child they had fought over, he was himself a child and "not right."

"We forgot," she said, in a soft shyness at having to remind him who was a professing Christian of what he knew far better than she, "Who was with us all the time: the Lord Jesus Christ."

She turned away from him, in a continued timidity at seeming to preach to him, and seated herself again by the other window. The newspaper clipping arrested her eye. She took it up, read it over slowly, read it again and Tenney watched her. Then she crumpled it in her hand and tossed it on the table. She glanced across at Tenney and spoke gravely, threading her needle with fingers that did not tremble.

"That's jest like him," she said. "Anybody 't knew him 'd know 'twas what he'd do. He's hand in glove with Edson that carries on that paper. They go to horse-trots together. He's willin' to call attention to himself, black eye an' all, if he can call attention to somebody else, same time. That's wormwood, too, Isr'el. We're the ones it's meant for, you an' me.'

XXXI

In a day or two Raven had convinced himself that Dick, firm-lipped, self-controlled, as if he had set himself a task, did not mean to leave him. Raven, half amused, half touched, accommodated his behavior to their closer relation and waited for Dick to disclose himself. He would have been light-heartedly glad of the boy's company if he had found no strangeness in it, no purpose he could not, from point to point, divine. Dick sent for more clothes, and a case came by post. He wrote in his chamber, for an hour or two every morning, and after that, Raven became conscious that the boy was keeping a watchful eye on him. If Raven went up to the hut, Dick was sure to appear there, in ten minutes at the most. Once, after a heavy snow, Raven had the wood road broken out, and Dick looked on in a darkling conjecture. And when Raven, now even to Jerry's wonder, proceeded to break from the hut to the back road, Dick found it not only impossible to restrain himself but wise to speak. They were standing by the hearth in the hut, after Raven had swept it and laid a careful fire. He had worked with all possible haste, for he never was there now without wondering whether she might come. He had been resting in the certainty of Tenney's crippled state, but the wounded foot, he knew, was bettering every day, and with it Tira's security lessened. Jerry's dismissal from the chores had troubled him so much that he had gone up, immediately after, to reason with Tenney. But Tenney was entering

the barn door at the moment of his turning into the yard, and Tira, following, stopped an instant and made Raven a little gesture that seemed to him one of hasty dismissal, and he went back home again.

"Jack," said Dick, this morning in the hut—it was as if he had to speak—"what are you getting this place ready for, and breaking out the back road? You don't need to come up here, in weather like this. If you do, you've got your snowshoes. What the deuce are you breaking out for?"

Raven stood a moment looking down at Tira's fire. It seemed a sacred pile, consecrated to holy use. What would Dick say if he told him the paths had been broken for a woman's flying feet, the fire was laid to warm her when she came here hunted by man's cruelty? Dick was said to have written some very strong verse, but how if he found himself up against life itself?

"It's a jolly old place," Raven said, rousing himself out of his musing. "As for breaking out, that's what oxen are for."

Dick was looking at him in a manifest concern. It was true affection. The boy might find it difficult to hail him across the interval of years between them, but he did love old Jack, though with the precise measure of patronage due the old.

"You know," said Dick, "it worries me like the deuce to see you coming up here like——"

He paused as if the matter were too complex to be gone into lightly.

"Like what?" Raven asked him.

"Well, we've been over that. You know who built this. You know what he did in it. He brought an old rip up here to live with him, and—oh, confound it, Jack! don't pretend you don't even remember old Crow."

"Yes," said Raven gravely, "I remember Old Crow."

"Well, anyhow," said Dick, "he was a family disgrace, and the less said about him the better."

"I showed you, the night you came," said Raven, "the story of Old Crow's life. You didn't quite catch on. Want another try at it?"

Dick had to search his memory. The only thing he had kept in mind about that night was his anger against Nan. There was a book, he recalled vaguely: some sort of stuff in a crabbed hand.

"Old Crow?" he said. "Old Crow never wrote anything."

"You think," said Raven, "he brought his bum up here and they sat and guzzled. Well, you're wrong, my son. Come, let's go down, and though I don't know whether it'll mean anything to you, you shall have another hack at Old Crow."

He was not easy until he had turned the key on the safety of the hut and started down the hill. When they had rounded the curve made by the three jutting firs, he stopped.

"Go on," he said. "I'll overtake you."

He ran back and slipped the key under the stone. It was a part of her security to keep the secret from Dick also.

No more was said of Old Crow that day, but, in the early evening, when they were before the fire, Raven brought down the book, always in the drawer of the little table by his bed. It was, in an undefined way, kindliness and company, always reminding him that, whatever his undesirable status now, he had been "the boy," and this was his own personal message from Old Crow.

"There you are," he said. He laid it on the table. "Don't read it unless you'd really rather. It's meant a

good deal to me. Maybe it won't to you. I don't know much about the processes of your mind. You may feel at home in this particular world. I never do. Old Crow didn't either. But you'll see."

Dick began to read and, since Nan was not by to be loved and hated, with an intent mind. Once or twice he turned back, Raven saw, to ponder some passage again. It was slow reading. He had not the passionate haste of one who has thirsted for some such community of assurance, and flies over the ground, plucking a leaf here and there, meaning to return. When he had finished he closed the book, laid it on the table, and pushed it aside as if he had definitely done with it.

"Jackie," said he, "I'm mighty glad you showed me this."

"Good!" said Raven. "Got inside it, have you?"

"Why, yes," said Dick, with assurance. "That's easy enough. It isn't new, you know. And it isn't so much my getting inside that as getting inside Old Crow."

"Oh!" said Raven mildly, "so you got inside Old Crow. Now what did you find there?"

"I don't know," said Dick, "whether you'd better be told. From a psychopathic point of view, that is. But I rather guess you ought."

"Dick," said Raven, "in the name of all the gods you worship, what shouldn't I be told? And exactly how do you see us two living along here, mild as milk? What's our relation? Sometimes, when I find you plodding after me, I feel as if you were my trainer. Sometimes I have a suspicion I really am off my nut and you're my keeper. Out with it, boy? How do you see it? Come!"

Dick, from a patent embarrassment, was staring down at the hearth, and now he looked quickly up in a frankness truly engaging.

"Jack," he said, "you needn't think you're going to be left here alone, to work things out by yourself. There's no danger of mother. I told her to keep off. She only irritates you. But she hasn't gone back home. She's right there in Boston, waiting to come."

Raven got up and walked back and forth through the room. Then he returned to his chair.

"Dick," he said conversationally, "if you were as young in years as you are in your mind, I'd mellow you.".

Dick generously ignored this. He had the impeccable good nature of the sane set in authority over the sick.

"What I think, is," he said, with a soothing intonation Raven despairingly recognized as the note of strength pitting itself against weakness, "we can work it out together, you and I. We can do it better than anybody else. I suppose if I went back you'd send for Nan. But that won't do, Jack. You'll see it for yourself, when you're all right again. Now what I mean about Old Crow is, that his complexes are like yours—or rather yours are like his. Don't you see what an influence he's had on you? More than Miss Anne even."

"Hold up," said Raven. "I'm being mighty patient with you, but certain things, you know, you don't say."

"You used to go up there and see him," said Dick, willingly relinquishing Miss Anne. There were times when, as he remembered from boyhood, old Jack was dangerous. "Some of the things about him shocked you. Some appealed to you. Pity, too: you must have pitied him tremendously. You probably knew about his craze over this girl he mentions here. You may have heard things about her, just as he did. Jack, I can see—the whole thing has come to me in the last ten minutes—Old Crow has been the big influence in your life. Everything else has come from that. And then the war knocked you out and you

got *cafard* and the whole blasted business blew up and came to the surface and—there you are."

"Yes," said Raven, "here we are."

He leaned back in his chair and laughed until he could have cried. Never had he found anything funnier than the boy's honest face and his honest voice pouring forth undigested scraps from haphazard gleanings.

"Dick," he said, "you're a dear fellow. But you're an awful ass. The trouble is with you, old man, you've no imagination. It was left out. You're too much like your mother and it'll be the death of you as it is of her if you don't stop being intelligent. That sort of popular science stuff, you know. Be a little sloppy, boy. Come off your high horse."

Dick was still unassailably good-natured. Raven was his job, and he could hold himself down with a steady hand.

"Now," said Raven, "for heaven's sake scrap your complexes, even if you scrap Old Crow with 'em, and let's see if we can't be moderately peaceable. That is, if we've got to be marooned here together."

And by dint of giving his mind to it, he was himself peaceable and even amusing, but as the dark came on he found he had much ado to keep up the game; he was too sensitively awake to Tira. With no new reason for it, he was plainly worried, and, leaving Dick reading by the fire, went up to his own room. He sat down by a front window, facing the dark wall of the hill, but when, after another hour, he heard Dick come up and shut himself in, he slipped down the stairs, took his cap and went off to the hut. The sky was dark, but clear, and the stars burned in galaxies of wonder. But the beauty of the night only excited and oppressed him until he could assure himself she was not out in it on one of her dreadful flights. If he

found her in the hut, he could go home to bed. He reached the door, stopped, and put his hand under the stone. The key was there, and he laughed out in his thankfulness. The laugh was at his fears, and he wondered whether he would rather think of her there in her prison or here, still under sentence, due at her prison again. Then he heard a step: a man's crashing on regardless of underbrush. Was it Tenney? Should he hear that voice as he had before in its wild "Hullo"?

"Where are you?" came the voice. "Where are you, old man?"

Dick had followed him and was, in his affectionate solicitude, warning him against surprise. Raven ran down to meet him, and by the turn of the fir trees they faced each other.

"Dick," said Raven, "what are you up here for?"

"Can't help it, old man," said Dick. The eagerness of his voice made it very moving. "Really, you know, I can't have you trotting round, this time of night, all by your lonesome. If you want to hang round here, you let me come, too. We'll light the fire and smoke a pipe and finish the night, if you say so. Come, old man. Come on."

"No," said Raven quietly, "we won't light fires and smoke pipes. We'll go down now, to bed. Dick, you're a fool. I've had to tell you so more than once. But you're a dear fool, and sometime I may be able to remember that and nothing else. Just now I can't seem to want to do anything but pitch you, neck and crop, into the snow.

They went down together, Dick still doggedly conscious of doing the only thing possible, and when they were near the foot of the hill, Raven yelled at him, the old Moosewood whoop, and sprang. It was the signal between them when one or the other had a mind to "wrastle," and they

stood there in the road and assailed each other scientifically and with vigor, to the great benefit of each. It was a beneficent outburst, and Charlotte, roused by the cry, ran to a chamber window and stood there in her nightgown, watching.

"How they do carry on!" she commented to Jerry, when they had separated and come in, chaffing volubly. "For all the world like two toms."

Things were easier between them, now they had mauled each other, and they ran upstairs together, "best friends" as they used to be when Dick learned the game. He was wonderfully encouraged. This was the Uncle Jack he used to tag about the place. He went to bed with a hopeful presentiment that, if things kept on like this, he might take Raven back to town presently, reasonable enough to place himself voluntarily in the right hands.

To Tira, the week dragged on with a malicious implication of never meaning to end until it ended her. Strange things could be done in a week, it reminded her, conclusive, sinister things. The old fears were on in full force, and though it had not looked as if they could be much augmented, now they piled up mountain high. And she presently found out they were not the old fears at all. There was a fresh menace, ingeniously new. She had studied the weather of Tenney's mind and knew the signs of it. She could even anticipate them. But this new menace she could never have foreseen. It was simply his crutch. An evil magic seemed to have fallen upon it, and it was no longer a crutch but a weapon. Tenney would not abandon it. His foot was improving fast, and the doctor had suggested his dropping the crutch for a cane; but he kept on with it, kept on obstinately without a spoken pretext. To Tira, there was something sinister in that. She saw him not relying on it to any extent, but

sedulously keeping it by him. Sometimes he gesticulated with it. He had, with great difficulty, brought in the cradle again, as if to emphasize his callousness to the gash in it, and once he tapped it with the crutch, while the baby lay there asleep, and set it rocking. Tira, cooking at the table, felt her heart stand still. An actual weapon she could flee from, but was this a weapon? The uncertainty was in itself terrifying.

It was the day he set the cradle rocking that she awoke in the night, her fear full upon her. He was at her side, sleeping heavily. The baby was on her other arm. Yet it seemed to her that the menace from Tenney had pierced her to reach the child and, on its passage, stabbed through her racing heart. Then her temptation came upon her, so simple a thing she seemed stupid never to have thought of it before. She rose to a sitting posture, put her feet out of bed, took the child, and carried him with her into the sitting-room. She laid him on the couch and covered him, and then stole back into the bedroom. The crutch was there, in its habitual place at night, leaning against the foot of the bed. She could put her hand on it in the dark. Tenney, too, she had begun to reflect, could put his hand on it. What deeds might he not do with it in those hours when the sanities of life also sleep? She took it gently and went out again through the sitting-room and kitchen into the shed. Her purpose had been to hide it behind the wood. But if he came on it there, it would not be a crutch he found. It would be a weapon. She put her hand on an upright beam, as she stood painfully thinking it out, and touched the handle of a saw, hanging there on a nail; immediately she knew. She went back into the kitchen, lighted the lantern and carried it into the shed. There stood the crutch leaning against the beam below the saw, a weapon beyond doubt. She set down her lan-

tern, laid the crutch on the block Tenney used to split kindlings, set her foot upon it and methodically sawed it into stove wood lengths. When it was done she gathered up the pieces, carried them into the sitting-room, to the stove where Tenney always, in winter weather, left a log to smoulder, dropped them in and opened the draught. Then she went back to the shed, swept up her scattering of sawdust, hung the saw in its place, gave a glance about her to see that everything was in its usual order, and returned into the kitchen. She put out the lantern, hung it on its nail, went into the sitting-room and partially shut the draft on the noisy blaze. She did not dare quite shut it, lest a bit of the weapon should be left to cry out from the ashes and tell. When she was back in bed again, the child on her arm, Tenney, disturbed by her coming, woke and turned. He lifted his head from the pillow, to listen, and she wondered if he could hear the beating of her heart.

"You there?" he asked. "What's that stove started out roarin' for? The chimbly ain't afire?"

"No," said Tira. "Mebbe somethin's ketched." She got out of bed, ran into the sitting-room, noiselessly shut the crack of draught, and came back. "Them knots are kinder gummy," she said calmly, and was heartened by the evenness of her voice. "I guess 'twon't roar long."

They listened together until the sound diminished, and Tira knew when he relaxed and dropped off again. It did not seem to her that she dropped off at all, she was so relieved to think of her enemy smouldering and done for.

This was the night Raven had had his premonition of her and gone up to the hut to find her, and the next night he was aware of her again, as if she had put a hand out through the darkness and given him an imploring touch.

He and Dick had had an almost jovial day. Their wrestling bout had proved sound medicine. It had, Raven thought, cleared the air of the fool things they had been thinking about each other. This evening they had talked, straight talk, as between men, chiefly of Dick's future and his fitness for literature. There was no hint of Nan, though each believed she was the pivot on which Dick's fortunes turned. About ten they went up to bed, and again Raven found himself too uneasy to sleep, and again he sat down by the window in the dark. Incredibly, yet as he found he knew it would happen, he saw a figure running up the path. It came almost to the front door, halted a moment, as if in doubt, stooped and threw up a clutch of snow against a window. The snow was full of icy pellets; they rattled against the pane. But it was not his window, which was dark; the hand had cast its signaling pellets to the room where a light was burning and where the outline of a man's figure had just been visible. And the man was Dick. But Raven knew. He opened his door and shut it as softly, stole down the stairs, opened the outer door, and drew her in. Then, in the instant of snapping on the light, he saw Tira recoil; for there, at the foot of the stairs, was Dick. She would have slipped out again, but Raven's hand was on her. He still held hers, as he had taken it, and now he turned her to the library door. It was all done quickly, and meantime he said to Dick, "Go back to bed," and Dick perhaps not responding exactly, commented under his breath, "Good God!" Raven followed Tira into the library, turned the key in the lock, switched on the light in his reading lamp, and drew a chair to the smouldering fire.

"Sit down," he said. "You must get warm."

He threw on cones and roused a leaping blaze. Then

he made himself look at her. He forgot Dick and Dick's shocked bewilderment. He was calm as men are calm in an accomplished certainty. She had come. She did not seem cold or in any sense excited, though she put her hands to the blaze and bent toward it absently, as if in courtesy because he had given it to her. As she sat, drawing long breaths that meant the ebbing of emotion, he let his eyes feed on her face. She was paler than he had seen her. There were shadows under her eyes, and the lashes on her cheek looked incredibly long: a curved inky splash. Her hood had fallen back, but she kept the blue cloak about her to her chin, as if it made a seclusion, a protection even against him. But it was only an instant before she withdrew her hands from the blaze and turned to him, with a little smile. She began to speak at once, as if she had scant time, either for indulging her own weakness or troubling him.

"You'll think it's queer," she said. "I've come here routin' you out o' bed when you've give me that nice place up there to run away to."

Raven found himself ready to break out into asseverations that it was the only natural thing for her to do. Where should she go, if not to him?

"No," he said, the more gravely because he was counseling himself while he answered her. "You did right. But," he added, "where's——?"

She understood. Where was the baby who always made the reason for her flight?

"He's up there," she answered, with a motion of her hand toward the road.

"In the hut?" he exclaimed. "You left him there?"

It seemed impossible.

"Yes," she said quietly, "all soul alone. I run out with him, same as I always have. I run up there. I found the

road all broke out. I wa'n't surprised. I knew you'd do it. That is, I'd ha' known it if I'd thought anything about it. An' I found the key an' started the fire. An' then I knew I'd got to see you this night, an' I put him on the lounge an' set chairs so's he wouldn't fall out, an' packed him round with pillers, an' locked him in an' left him."

She paused and Raven nodded at her as if he wanted to find it as simple as it seemed to her.

"You see, I couldn't bring him down here," she said. "He might cry. An' there's Charlotte. An' Jerry. An' the young man. I'm sorry the young man see me. That's too bad."

"It's all right," said Raven briefly, though he was aware it was, from Dick's present point of view, all wrong. "I'll attend to that."

"He's safe enough," said Tira, her eyes darkening as she recurred to the baby. "If he cries, 'twon't do no hurt up there. Well!" She seemed to remind herself that there was much to say. "I must be gittin' along with my story." She looked at him in a most moving wistfulness, and added: "I got scared."

XXXII

Raven gave his answering nod. That seemed to be about all he could respond with, in his danger of saying the rash thing.

"Yes," he said, "scared. Same way?"

"No," she said. "Worse. I guess I never've been so scared. An' I've got myself to thank. You see, last night——"

"Yes," said Raven. "I got wind of it last night."

This, though it puzzled her, she could not stay to follow out, with the baby up in the hut defended only by pillows and Tenney perhaps turning to ask: "You there?"

"You see," she said, "it's his crutch."

"You mean," supplied Raven, brute anger rising up in him against brute man, "he's struck you with it?"

"No, no," she hastened to assure him. "He ain't even threatened me. Only somehow it was like his havin' somethin' always by him, somethin' he could strike with, an'—I dunno what come over me—I burnt it up."

At once Raven faced the picture of it, the mad impulse, the resulting danger. But he would not add his apprehensiveness to hers.

"I dunno," she said, "as you'll hardly see what I mean: but it begun to look kinder queer to me, that crutch did. All I could think of was how much better 'twould be for everybody concerned if 'twas burnt up."

"Yes," said Raven. "I see. We all feel so sometimes, when we're tired out." The moderation of these words

but ill expressed his tumultuous mind. That was it, his passionate understanding told him. The natural world throws its distorted shadows, and our eyes have to be at their strongest not to recoil in panic, while we turn back to strike. "And," he said, because she seemed to be mired here in the bog of her own wonderment, "in the morning of course he found it out."

The strangest look came into her face: she was horrified, and more than that, indubitably more, she was perplexed.

"Yes," she said, "he found it out. 'Course he found it out first thing, 'fore he dressed him even. I got up early an' made the fires. I've been makin' 'em sence he's laid up. So I don't know no more'n the dead how he looked when it first come over him the crutch wa'n't there. But he come out int' the kitchen—I'd been t' the barn then an' give the cows some fodder—an' he carried a cane, his gran'ther's it was, same's the crutch. It's got a crook handle, an' I've kep' it in the chimney corner to pull down boxes an' things from the upper cupboard. An' he went out to the barn an' come in an' eat his breakfast, an' eat his dinner an' his supper, when they come round, an' we done the barn work together, an' he ain't mentioned the crutch from first to last."

"Well," said Raven, in a futile reassurance, "perhaps he thinks he's left it somewhere, and if he doesn't particularly need it—Jerry told me only this morning the doctor said he might as well be getting used to a cane."

"No," said Tira conclusively, "he don't think he's left it anywheres. He's keepin' still, that's all."

Immediately Raven saw the menacing significance of Tenney's keeping still. His mind ran with a quick foot over the imprisonment of the two there together. Was there a moment, he wondered, when the suffering brute

was not threatening to her, when her heart could rest itself for the next hurried flight? He ventured his question.

"Has he been"—he hesitated for a word and found what sounded to him a mawkish one—"good to you at all, these last weeks?"

Tira reflected a moment and then, for the first time since she came in from the cold, the blood rushed to her haggard cheeks. She remembered a moment, the day before the burning of the crutch, when he had found her doing her hair before the bedroom glass and had caught her to him wildly. She had put him away from her, though gently, because his violence, whether it took the form of starved passion or raging hate, always seemed to her the unbecoming riot of a forward child, and he had left her in a shamefaced anger, a grumbling attempt to recover his lost dignity. Tira hid even from herself the miserable secrets of marital savagery. No sacrifice was too great to hide from Tenney her knowledge of his abasement. Most of all must she hide it from another man, and that man Raven. Her answer was not ready, but she had it for him, and he understood, in his unfailing knowledge of her, that it was the first crooked one she had ever given him, and for the first time he felt anger toward her. She was defending her enemy, and against him.

"He does the best he can," she said. "He takes things terrible hard. I dunno's I ever see anybody that took 'em so hard."

Then, as he did not speak, she looked at him and meeting the cold unresponsiveness in his face her composure broke and she stretched out her hands to him in a wildness of entreaty.

"Oh, don't you look like that," she cried. "If you turn from me 'twill be my death."

He was not cold now He bent to her and took her hands in his.

"Tira," he said, "come away with me You can't bear this any longer. Take the child and come. You'd be safe. You'd be happy, if you weren't afraid. Don't go back there for another minute. Stay here over night, and tomorrow I'll take you away."

He was looking at her, his eyes holding hers as his hands held her hands. And, whatever he had meant, the strangest, swiftest retribution of his life came to him through the change in her face. How could flesh and muscle bring about such an alteration in human line and texture, the Mother of Sorrows transformed to a Medusa head? Her lips parted, trembling over words they could not bring themselves to say. Her eyes widened into darkness. Her brows drew together in a pitiful questioning. And her voice, when she did speak, was a vibrating protest against what her eyes knew and her mind.

"You don't mean," she said, "*that?*"

Raven dropped her hands as if they had struck him. The question was a rushing commentary on his life and hers. Was he, she meant, only another actor in this drama of man's hunger and savagery? Was he a trader in the desire of beauty, that tragic dower nature had thrown over her like a veil, so that whoever saw it with a covetous eye, longed to possess and and rend it? Probably Tira never did what would be called thinking. But her heart had a vital life of its own, her instinct was the genius of intuition. He had been kind to her, compassionate. She had built up a temple out of her trust in him, and now he had smoked the altar with the incense that was rank in her nostrils. He had brought, not flowers and fruits, but the sacrifice of blood. And he, on his part, what did he think? Only that he must save her.

"No, Tira," he said, "I don't mean that. I mean—what you want me to mean. You can't understand what it is to a man to know you're afraid, to know you're in danger and he can't help you. I didn't ask you as I ought. I asked you to come away with me. I ask you again. Come away with me and I'll take you to the best place I know. I'll take you to Nan."

He had not guessed he was going to say this. Only, as he spoke, he knew in his inner mind the best place was Nan. Suddenly she seemed to be in the room with them. What was it but her cool fragrant presence? And she understood. Tira might not. She might feel these turbid waves of his response to he knew not what: the beauty and mystery of the world, the urge of tyrant life, all bound up in the presence of this one woman. She was woman, hunted and oppressed. He was man, created, according to the mandate of his will, to save or to undo her. But the world and the demands of it, clean or unclean, could not be taken at a gulp. He must get hold of himself and put his hand on Tira's will. For she could only be saved against her own desire. Whatever he had seemed to ask her, or whatever his naked mind and rebellious lips had really asked, he could not beg her to forgive him. He must not own to a fault in their relation, lest he seem, as he had at that moment, an enemy the more.

"That's exactly what you must do," he said. "You must let me take you to Nan."

A soft revulsion seemed to melt her to an acquiescence infinitely grateful to her.

"That," she said, "was what I had in mind. If she'd take him—the baby—an' put him somewhere. She said there were places. She said so herself. I dunno's you knew it, but she talked to me about him. She said there was ways folks know now about doin' things for 'em

when they ain't right, an' makin' the most you can of 'em. She told me if I said the word, she'd come here an' carry him back with her."

"But," said Raven, "what about you? I'm ready to stand by the child, just as Nan is. But I'm doing it for your sake. What about you?"

"Oh," said Tira, with a movement of her eloquent hands, as if she tossed away something that hindered her, "tain't no matter about me. I've got to stay here. Mr. Raven"—her voice appealed to him sweetly. He remembered she had not so used his name before—"I told you that. I can't leave him."

The last word she accented slightly, and Raven could not tell whether the stress on it was the tenderness of affection, or something as moving, yet austere. And now he had to know.

"You want to stay with him"—— he began, and Tira interrupted him softly, looking at him meantime, as if she besought him to understand:

"I promised to."

Raven sat there and looked into the fire, thinking desperately. At that moment, he wanted nothing in the world so much as to snatch her away from Tenney and set her feet in a safe place. But did he want it solely for her or partly for himself? What did it matter? Casuistry was far outside the tumult of desire. He would kick over anything, law or gospel, to keep her from going back there this night. Yet he spoke quietly:

"We'll go up and get the baby, and I'll call Charlotte, and you'll stay here to-night. To-morrow we'll go."

"No," said Tira, gently but immovably, "I couldn't have Charlotte an' Jerry brought into it. Not anyways in the world."

"Why not?" asked Raven.

"I couldn't," she said. "They're neighbors. They're terrible nice folks, but folks have to talk—they can't help it—an', 'fore you knew it, it'd be all over the neighborhood. An' he's a professin' Christian. 'Twould be terrible for him."

Sometimes he only knew from the tone of her voice, in this general vagueness of expecting him to understand her, whether she meant Tenney or the child.

"What I thought was," she went on timidly, "if she'd come an' git him"—and here "him" evidently meant the child—" 'twould be reasonable she was takin' him back where he could be brought up right. She'd just as soon do it," she assured him earnestly, as if he had no part in Nan. "Some folks are like that. They're so good."

He was insatiate in his desire to understand her.

"And you mean," he said, with a directness he was willing to tincture with a cruelty sharp enough to serve, "to send the child off somewhere where he will be safe, and then live here with this brute, have more children by him——"

"No! no!" she cried sharply. "Not that! don't you say that to me. I can't bear it. Not from you! My God help me! not from you."

He understood her. She loved him. He was set apart by her overwhelming belief in him, but she was in all ways, the ways of the flesh as well as the spirit, consecrated to him. Her body might become the prey of man's natural cruelty, and yet, while she wept her tears of blood in this unreasoning slavery, she held one worship. There he would be alone. The insight of the awakened mind told him another thing: that, in spite of her despairing loyalty, he could conquer her scruples. He could, by the sheer weight of a loving will, force her to follow him. A

warm entreaty, one word of his own need, and she would answer. And while he thought, the jungle feeling came upon him, hot, hateful to his conscious mind, the feeling of the complexity of it all, strange beasts of emotion out for prey, the reason drugged with nature's sophistries. The jungle! That was what Nan had called it, this welter of human misery. Who else had been talking to him about it? Why, Old Crow! He had not called it the jungle, but he had been lost in its tortuous ways. This prescience to Old Crow brought a queer feeling, as if a cool air blew on him. The jungle feeling passed. Almost he had the vision of an eternal city, built up by the broken but never wholly failing strength of man, and Old Crow there beckoning him into it and telling him he'd kept a place for him. And the cool breeze which was Old Crow told him that although Tira must be rescued, if it could be brought about, it must not be through any of the jungle ways. She must not be drugged by jungle odors and carried off unwillingly, even to the Holy City itself, by that road. He and Tira—yes, he and Tira and Nan—would march along together with their eyes open. He hastened to speak, to commit himself to what he must deliberately wish:

"Then we'll telephone Nan."

She looked at him, all gratitude. Her friend had gone away into strange dark corners of life where only her instinct followed him, and here he was back again.

"No," she said, "don't you telephone. Somebody'd listen in. You write. I guess mebbe nothin'll happen right off, even if I did burn the crutch. I guess I got kinder beside myself to-night. I ain't likely to be so ag'in."

"I'll walk up to the hut with you," said Raven, rising as she did, "and see you safe inside."

"No," said she, "I couldn't let you no ways. It's bad enough as 'tis."

By this she meant the paragraph in the paper which had laid an insulting finger on him; but he had not seen it and did not understand. Only it was plain to him that she would not let him go. She drew her hood up, and made it secure under her chin. Then she looked at him and smiled a little. She had to smile, her woman's instinct told her, to reassure him. She opened the door, and though he followed her quickly, had slipped through the outer door as softly and was gone. He stood there on the sill watching her hurrying to the road. When she had turned to the right, she began to run, and he went down the path after her to look up the road, lest she had seen something pursuing her. But the night was still. There was no sound of footsteps on the snow, and the far-off barking of a fox made the silence more complete. She was only hurrying, because her mother heart had wakened suddenly to the loneliness of the child up there among the pillows, torturing herself with wonders that she could leave him. He went out into the road and continued on her track, until he saw her turn into the woods. Then, waiting until she should be far enough in advance not to catch the sound of his pursuit, he suddenly heard footsteps on the road and turned. A man was coming rapidly. It was Dick.

XXXIII

In his relief—for, in spite of the man's lameness, he had made sure it was Tenney—Raven laughed out. At once he sobered, for why was Dick here but to spy on him?

"Well," he inquired brusquely, "what is it?"

They turned together, and Dick did not speak. When they had gone in and Raven closed the hall door and glanced at him, he was suddenly aware that the boy had not spoken because he could not trust himself. His brows were knit, his face dark with reproachful anger.

"Think the old man shouldn't have gone out in the cold without his hat and muffler?" asked Raven satirically.

"Yes," said Dick, in a quick outburst. "I think just that. It's a risk you've no business to take. In your condition, too. Oh, yes, I know you do look fit enough, but you can't depend on that. Besides—Jack, who's that woman? What's she going up into the woods for? She's not going to the hut? Is that why——?"

Raven stood looking at him, studying not so much his face as the situation. He turned to the library door.

"Come in, Dick," he said. We'll talk it out. We can't either of us sleep."

Dick followed him in and they took their accustomed chairs. Raven reached for his pipe, but he did not fill it: only sat holding it, passing his thumb back and forth over the bowl. He was determining to be temperate, to be fair. Dick could not forget he was old, but he must force himself not to gibe at Dick for being young.

"Do you feel able," he said, "to hear a queer story and keep mum over it? Or do you feel that a chap like me, who ought to be in the Psychopathic, hasn't any right to a square deal? When you see me going off my nut, as you expect, shall you feel obliged to give in your evidence, same as families do to the doctor and the clergyman if a man's all in?"

Dick was straight.

"I'll do my best," he said. "But a woman—like that—and you meeting her as you did! It's not like you, Jack. You never'd have done such a thing in all your born days if you weren't so rattled."

There were arguments at the back of his mind he could not, in decency, use. He remembered Raven's look when he drew her in, and the tragic one that mirrored it: passionate entreaty on the woman's face, on the man's passionate welcome. As usual, it was the real witnesses of life standing dumb in the background that alone had the power to convict. But they could not be brought into court. Custom forbade it, the code between man and man. Yet there they were, all the same.

"Well!" said Raven. He had responded with only a little whimsical lift of the eyebrows to this last. "If you won't trust me, I must you. That's all there is about it. The woman is our neighbor, Israel Tenney's wife, and she's in danger of her life from her husband, and she won't leave him."

Dick stared as at the last thing he had expected. He shook his head.

"Too thin," he said. "I've seen Tenney and I've heard him spoken of. He's a psalm-singing Methody, or something of that sort. Why, I met him one day, Jerry and I, and he stared at me as if he wanted to know me again. And Jerry said afterward he was probably going to ask

me if I'd found the Lord; but he changed his mind or something. No, Jack, don't you be taken in. That woman's pulling your leg."

"Dick," said Raven, "I've been told you have a very vivid sense of drama in your narrative verse. You couldn't, by any possibility, apply it to real life?"

"Oh, I know," said Dick, "New England's chock full of tragedy. But I tell you I've seen Tenney. He's only a kind of a Praise-God Barebones. Put him back a few hundred years, and you'd see him sailing for Plymouth, for freedom to worship God. (Obstinate, too, like the rest of 'em. He wouldn't worship anybody else's God, only the one he'd set up for himself.) If his wife didn't mind him, he might pray with her or growl over the dinner table, but he wouldn't bash her head in. Understand, Jack, I've seen Tenney."

"Yes," said Raven drily, "I've seen Tenney, too. And seen him in action. Now, Dickie, you put away your man-of-the-world attitude toward battle, murder, and sudden death, and you let me tell you a few things about Tenney."

He began with the day when he had found Tira in the woods. He touched on the facts briefly, omitting to confess what the woman looked to his dazzled eyes. It was a drawing austerely black and white. Could he tell anyone—anyone but Nan—how she had seemed to him there, the old, old picture of motherhood, divine yet human? It was too much to risk. If he did lay his mind bare about that moment which was his alone, and Dick met it with his unimaginative astuteness, he could not trust himself to be patient with the boy. He said little more than that he had given her the freedom of the hut, and that he meant always to have it ready for her. Then he came to this last night of all, when she had run

away from Tenney, not because he had been violent, but because he had "kept still." That did take hold on Dick's imagination, the imagination he seemed able to divorce from the realities of life and kept for the printed page.

"By thunder!" he said. "Burned the crutch, did she? That's a story in itself, a real story: Mary Wilkins, Robert Frost. That's great!"

"Sounds pretty big to me," said Raven quietly. "But it's not for print. See you don't feel tempted to use it. Now, here we are with Tira up against it. She's got to make a quick decision. And she's made it."

"Do you call her by her first name?" asked Dick, leaping the main issue to frown over the one possibly significant of Raven's state of mind.

"Yes," said Raven steadily, "I rather think I call her by her first name. I don't know whether I ever have 'to her head,' as Charlotte would say, but I don't seem to feel like calling her by Tenney's name. Well, Tira's decided. She's going to give her baby to Nan."

Dick's eyes enlarged to such an extent, his mouth opened so vacuously, that Raven laughed out. Evidently Dick wasn't regarding the matter from Tira's standpoint, or even Raven's now, but his own.

"Nan!" he echoed, when he could get his lips into action. "Where does Nan come in?"

"Oh," said Raven, with a most matter-of-fact coolness, "Nan came in long ago. I told her about it, and it seems she went to see Tira off her own bat, and offered to take the baby."

"She sha'n't do it," proclaimed Dick. "I simply won't have it, that's all."

"I fancy," said Raven, "Nan'll tell you you've got nothing whatever to do with it. And really, Dick, you

never'll get Nan by bullying her. Don't you know you won't?"

Dick, having a perfectly good chance, turned the tables on him neatly.

"That'll do," said he, remembering how Raven had shut him up when he dragged in Anne Hamilton. "We won't discuss Nan."

Now it was Raven's turn to gape, but on the heels of it, seeing the neatness of the thrust, he smiled.

"Right, boy," he said. "Good for you. We won't discuss Nan, and we won't discuss Tira. But you'll hold your tongue about this business, and if you find me opening the door of my house at midnight, you'll remember it's my business, and keep your mouth shut. Now I'm going up the hill to see she's safe, and if you follow me, in your general policy of keeping on my trail, I don't quite know what will happen. But something will—to one of us."

He got up, went into the hall and found his cap and leather jacket. Dick meantime stood in the library door regarding him from so troubled a mind that Raven halted and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Cut it out, boy," he said, "all this guardian angel business. You let me alone and I'll let you alone. We're both decent chaps, but when you begin with your psychotherapy and that other word I don't know how to pronounce——"

Dick, having, at this period of his life only an inactive sense of humor, mechanically supplied it: "Psychiatry."

"What a beast of a word! Yes, that's it. Well, they're red rags to me, all these gadgets out of the half-baked mess they've stirred up by spying on our insides. I can't be half decent to you. But I want to be. I want

us to be decent to each other. It's damnable if we can't. Go to bed, and I'll run up and see if poor Tira's safe."

He did not wait for an answer, but went out at the front door, and Dick heard him whistling down the path. The whistle seemed like an intentional confirmation of his being in a cheerfully normal frame of mind, not likely to be led too far afield by premonitions of New England tragedy. Perhaps that was why he did whistle, for when he reached the road he stopped and completed the first half of the ascent in silence. Then, as the whistle might mean something reassuring to Tira, he began again with a bright loudness, bold as the oriole's song. He reached the hut, whistling up to the very door, and then his breath failed him on a note, the place looked so forbiddingly black in the shadow, the woods were so still. It did not seem possible that a woman's warm heart was beating inside there, Tira's heart, home of loves unquenchable. He put his hand down under the stone. The key was there, and rising, he felt his mind heavy with reproaches of her. She had gone back to Tenney. The night's work was undone. What was the use of drawing her a step along the path of safety if she turned back the instant he trusted her alone? He went down the hill again in a dull distaste for himself. It seemed to him another man might have managed it better, swept her off her feet and bound her in an allegiance where she would obey. When he reached his own house, he was too discontented even to glance at Dick's window and wonder whether the boy was watching for him. The place was silent, and he put out the lights and went to bed.

Next morning he had got hold of himself and, with that obstinate patience which is living, went to the library after breakfast and called up Nan. It was won-

derful to hear her fresh voice. It broke in upon his discouragements and made them fly, like birds feeding on evil food. Would she listen carefully, he asked. Would she translate him, because he couldn't speak in any detail. And when he had got thus far, he remembered another medium, and began the story of last night in French. Nan listened with hardly a commenting word, and when he had finished her bald answer was ridiculously reassuring.

"Sure!" said Nan. "I'll be there to-night. Send Jerry for me. Eight o'clock."

"God bless you!" said Raven. "You needn't bring any luggage. It'll probably be wiser to go right back."

Nan said "Sure!" again, no doubt, Raven thought, as indicating her view of her errand as a homespun one there was no doubt of her carrying out with the utmost simplicity. Then he went to tell Jerry he was to meet the evening train, and on the way he told Dick:

"Nan's coming to-night."

"Nan!" said Dick. "Not——"

"Yes," said Raven. "I telephoned her. Buck up, old man. Here's another chance for you, don't you see? We're in a nasty hole, Tira and incidentally Nan and I. Play the game, old son, and help us out."

"What," inquired Dick, "do you expect me to do?"

"Chiefly," said Raven, "keep out. It's my game and Nan's and Tira's. But you play yours. Don't sulk. Show her what a noble Red Man you can be."

Dick turned away, guiltily, Raven thought, as if he had plans of his own. What the deuce did he mean to do? But their day passed amicably enough, though they were not long together. Raven went up to the hut and stayed most of the afternoon. It was not so much that he expected Tira to come as that he felt the nearness

of her there in the room she had disarranged with barricading chairs and pillows and then put in order again before she left. He could see her stepping softly about, with her deft, ordered movements, making it comely for him to find. She had left pictures of herself on the air, sad pictures, most of them, telling the tale of her terror and foreboding, but others of them quite different. There were moments he remembered when, in pauses of her talk with him, she glanced at the child, and still others when she sat immobile, her hands clasped on her knee, her gaze on the fire. Henceforth the hut would be full of her presence, hers and Old Crow's. And, unlike as they were, they seemed to harmonize. Both were pitiful and yet austere in their sincerity; and for both life had been a coil of tangled meanings. He stayed there until nearly dark, and his musings waxed arid and dull with the growing chill of the room. For he would not light the fire. It had to be left in readiness.

When he went down he found Dick uneasily tramping the veranda.

"Charlotte wants us to have a cup of tea," said Dick. "She said supper's put off till they come."

"They?" inquired Raven. "Who's they?"

"It's no use, Jack," Dick broke forth. "I might as well tell you. I s'pose if I didn't you'd kick up some kind of a row later. I telephoned Mum."

"You don't mean," said Raven, in a voice of what used to be called "ominous calm," before we shook off the old catch-words and got indirections of our own, "you don't mean you've sent for her!"

"It's no use," said Dick again, though with a changed implication, "you might as well take things as they are. Nan can't come up here slumming without an older woman. It isn't the thing. It simply isn't done."

Raven, through the window, saw Charlotte hovering in the library with the tea tray. He watched her absently, as if his mind were entirely with her. Yet really it was on the queerness of things as they are in the uniform jacket of propriety and the same things when circumstance thrusts the human creature out of his enveloping customs and sends him into battle. He thought of Dick's philosophy of the printed word. He thought of Nan's desperate life of daily emergency in France. Yet they were all, he whimsically concluded, being squared to Aunt Anne's rigidity of line. But why hers? Why not Old Crow's? Old Crow would have had him rescue Tira, even through difficult ways. He opened the door.

"Come on in," he said. "Charlotte's buttered the toast."

Dick followed him, and they sat down to their abundant tea, Charlotte pausing a moment to regard them with her all-enveloping lavishment of kindliness. Were they satisfied? Could she bring something more?

"The trouble with you, Dick," said Raven, after his third slice of toast, buttered, he approvingly noted, to the last degree of drippiness, "is poverty of invention. You repeat your climax. Now, this sending for Milly: it's precisely what you did before. That's a mistake the actors make: repeated farewells."

Dick made no answer. He, too, ate toast prodigiously.

"Now," said Raven, when they had finished, "do I understand you mean to put your mother wise about what I told you last night? Yes or no?"

"I shall do——" said Dick, and at his pause Raven interrupted him.

"No, you won't," said he. "You won't do what you think best. Take it from me, you won't. What I told you wasn't my secret. It's poor Tira's. If you give her away to your mother—good God! think of it, Milly, with her

expensive modern theories and her psychiatry—got it right, that time!—muddling up things for a woman like her! Where was I? Well, simply, if you play a dirty trick like that on me, I'll pack you off, you and your mother both. I don't like to remind you; but, after all, old man, the place is mine."

The blood came into Dick's face. He felt misjudged in his affection and abused.

"You can't see," he said. "I don't believe it's because you can't. You won't. It isn't Nan alone. It's you. You're not fit. You're no more fit than you were when Mum was here before. And you can pack me off, but, by thunder! I won't go."

"Very well," said Raven, with a happy inspiration. "You needn't. I'll go myself. And I'll take Nan with me." A picture of Nan and her own vision of happy isles came up before him, and he concluded: "Yes, by George! I'll take Nan. And we'll sail for the Malay Peninsula, or an undiscovered island, and wear Mother Hubbards and live on breadfruit, and you and your precious conventions can go to pot."

So, having soothed himself by his own intemperance, he got up, found his pipe and a foolish novel he made a point of reading once a year—it would hardly do to tell what it was, lest the reader of this true story fail to sympathize with his literary views and so with all his views—and sat down to await his guests in a serviceable state of good humor. He had brought Dick to what Charlotte would call "a realizing sense." He could afford a bit of tolerance. Dick got up and flung out of the room, finding Raven, he told himself, in one of his extravagant moods. Nine times out of ten the moods meant nothing. On the other hand, in this present erratic state of a changed Raven, they might mean anything. For himself, he was

impatient, with the headlong rush of young love. Nan was coming. She was on the way. Would she be the same, distant with her cool kindliness, her old lovely self to Raven only, or might she be changed into the Nan who kissed him that one moment of his need? He snatched his hat and tore out of the house, and Raven, glancing up from his novel, saw him striding down the path and thought approvingly he was a wise young dog to walk off some of his headiness before Nan came. As for him, he would doze a little over his foolish book, as became a man along in years. That was what Charlotte would say, "along in years." Was it so? What a devil of an expression, like all the rest of them that were so much worse than the thing itself: "elderly," "middle-aged," what a grotesque vocabulary! And he surprised himself by throwing his foolish book, with an accurate aim, at a space in the shelves, where it lodged and hung miserably, and getting up and tearing down the walk at a pace emulating Dick's, but in the opposite direction: the result of these athletic measures being that when Amelia and Nan drove up with Jerry, the station master's pung following with two small trunks that seemed to wink at Raven, with an implication of their competitive resolve to stay, two correctly clad gentlemen were waiting on the veranda in a state of high decorum. As to the decorum, it didn't last, so far as Raven was concerned. Messages of a mutual understanding passed between his eyes and Nan's. He burst into sudden laughter, but Nan, more sagely alive to the dangers of the occasion, kept her gravity.

"Well," said Amelia, as Raven, still laughing, solicitously lifted her out, "you seem to be in a very happy frame of mind. I'm glad you *can* laugh."

XXXIV

Thereafter they all behaved as if they had separated yesterday and nothing was more natural than to find themselves together again. Amelia, with bitterness in her heart, accepted the room she again longed to repudiate, and Nan, with a lifted eyebrow at Raven, as if wondering whether she'd really better be as daring as he indicated, followed Charlotte up the stairs. At supper they talked decorously of the state of the nation, which Raven frankly conceived of as going to the dogs, and Amelia upheld, from an optimisim which assumed Raven to be amenable to only the most hopeful of atmospheres. After supper, when they hesitated before the library door, Nan said quite openly, as one who has decided that only the straight course will do:

"Rookie, could I see you a minute? In the dining-room?" She took in Amelia with her frank smile. "Please, Mrs. Powell! It's business."

"Certainly," Amelia said, rather stiffly. "Come, Dick. We'll keep up the fire."

They had evidently, she and Dick, resolved, though independently of each other, to behave their best, and Dick, in excess of social virtue, shut the library door, so that no wisp of talk would float that way and settle on them. Nan confronted Raven with gayest eyes.

"Did you ever!" she said, recurring to the Charlottian form of comment. "At the last minute, if you please, when I was taking the train. There she was behind me.

We talked all the way, 'stiddy stream' (Charlotte!) and not a thing you could put your finger on. Did he send for her?"

"I rather think so," said Raven, giving Dick every possible advantage. Then, rallied by her smiling eyes, "Well, yes, of course he did. Don't look at me like that. I have to turn myself inside out, you she-tyrant!"

"Does Dick know?" she hastened to ask. "About Tira?"

"Yes."

"Know what I'm here for?"

"Yes."

"Given his word not to blab? Hope to die?" That was their childish form of vow, hers and Dick's.

"I hope so," said Raven doubtfully. "I represented it to him as being necessary."

"I'll represent it, too," said Nan. "Now, Rookie, I'm going over there, first thing to-morrow morning. I'm going to see Tenney."

"The deuce you are! I'm afraid that won't do."

"Nothing else will," said Nan. "Tenney's got to give his consent. We can't do any kidnaping business. That's no good."

She said it with the peremptory implication of extinguishing middle-aged scruples, and Raven also felt it to be "no good."

"Very well," said he. "You know best. I'll go with you."

"Oh, no, you won't. There are too many men-folks in it now. I'm going alone. Now, come back and talk to the family. Oh, I hope and pray Dick'll be good! Doesn't he look dear to-night, all red, as if he'd been logging? Has he? Have you? You look just the same. Oh, I do love Dick! I wish he'd let me, the way I want to."

Meantime Charlotte had come in, and Nan went to her

and put her hands on her shoulders and rubbed cheeks, as she used to do with Raven.

"Come on," she said to him. "Time!"

So they went into the library and conversed, with every conventional flourish, until Amelia set the pace of retirement by a ladylike yawn. But she had a word to say before parting, reserved perhaps to the last because she found herself doubtful of Raven's response. If she had to be snubbed she could simply keep on her way out of the room.

"John," said she, at the door, with the effect of a sudden thought, "how about Anne's estate? Are they getting it settled?"

Raven hesitated a perceptible instant. He somehow had an idea the estate was an affair of his, not to say Nan's.

"I suppose so," he answered, frowning. "Whitney's likely to do the right thing."

Amelia was never especially astute in the manner of danger signals.

"I suppose," she said, "you've made up your mind what to invest in. Or are the things in pretty good shape? Can you leave them as they are?"

Dick was standing by the hearth, wishing hard for a word with Nan. She had smiled at him once or twice, so peaceably! The next step might be to a truce and then everlasting bliss. Now, suddenly aware of his mother, he ungratefully kicked the fire that was making him such pretty dreams, went to her, took her by the arm and proceeded with her across the hall.

"You talk too much," said Dick, when he had her inside her room. "Don't you know better than to drag in Miss Anne? He's touchy as the devil."

"Then he must get over it," said Amelia, in her best

manner of the intelligent mentor. "Of course, she was a great loss to him."

"Don't you believe it," said Dick conclusively. "She had her paw on him. What the deuce is it in him that makes all the women want to dry-nurse him and build him up and make him over?"

Then he wondered what Nan was saying to Raven at the moment, remembered also Raven's injunction to play a square game with her and, though his feet were twitching to carry him back to the library, sat doggedly down at his mother's hearth and encouraged her to talk interminably. Amelia was delighted. She didn't know Dick had so earnest an interest in the Federation of Clubs and her popular course in economics. She was probably never more sustainedly intelligent than in that half hour, until Dick heard Nan going up to bed, sighed heavily, and lost interest in the woman citizen.

Nan and Raven, standing by the fire, in their unexpected minute of solitude, looked at each other and smiled in recognizing that they were alone and that when that happened things grew simple and straight. To Raven there was also the sense of another presence. Anne had somehow been invoked. Amelia, with her unfailing dexterity in putting her foot in, had done it: but still there Anne was, with the unspoken question on her silent lips. What was he going to do? He knew her wish. Presently he would have her money. He caught the interrogation in Nan's eyes. What was he going to do?

"I don't know, Nan," he said. "I don't know."

"Never mind," said Nan. "You'll know when the time comes."

And he was aware that she was still in her mood of forcing him on to make his own decisions. But, easily as he read her mind, there were many things he did not see

there. It was a turmoil of questions, and of these the question of Aunt Anne was least. Did he love Tira? This headed the list. Did he want to tear down his carefully built edifice of culture and the habit of conventional life, and run away with Tira to elemental simplicities and sweet deliriums? And if he did love Tira, if he did want to tear down his house of life and live in the open, she would help him. But all she said was:

"Good night, Rookie. I'm sleepy, too."

To leap a dull interval of breakfast banalities is to find Nan, on a crisp day, blue above and white below, at the Tenneys' door. Tira, frankly apprehensive, came to let her in. Tira had had a bad night. The burning of the crutch fanned a fire of torment in her uneasy mind. She had hardly slept, and though she heard Tenney's regular breathing at her side, she began to have a suspicion it was not a natural breathing. She was persuaded he meant now to keep track of her, by night as well as day. It began to seem to her a colossal misfortune that the crutch was not there leaning against the foot of the bed, and now its absence was not so much her fault as a part of its own malice. Nan, noting the worn pallor of her face and the dread in her eyes, gathered that Tenney was at home. She put out her hand, and Tira, after an instant's hesitation, gave hers. Nan wondered if she were in a terror wild enough to paralyze her power of action. Still, she had given her hand, and when Nan stepped up on the sill, with a cheerful implication of intending, against any argument, to come in, she stood aside and followed her. But at the instant of her stepping aside, Nan was aware that she threw both hands up slightly. It was the merest movement, an unstudied gesture of despair. Tenney was sitting by the kitchen stove, and Nan went to him with outstretched hand.

"I thought I should find you if I came early enough," she said. "How's your foot?"

She had a direct address country folk liked. She was never "stand-off," "stuck-up." It was as easy talking with her as with John Raven.

"Some better, I guess," said Tenney. He eyed her curiously. Had Raven sent her, for some hidden reason, to spy out the land?

"You get round, don't you?" pursued Nan.

She took the chair Tira brought her and regarded him across the shining stove. Tira withdrew to a distance, and stood immovable by the scullery door, as if, Nan thought, she meant to keep open her line of retreat.

"No," said Tenney grimly, "I don't git about much. Three times a day I git from the house to the barn. I expect to do better, as time goes on. I've got my eye on a cord wood stick, an' I'm plannin' how I can whittle me out a crutch."

Nan, glancing at Tira, caught the tremor that went over her and understood this was, in a veiled way, a threat. She came, at a leap, to the purpose of her call.

"Mr. Tenney," she said, "I'm an awfully interfering person. I've come to ask you and your wife to let me do something."

Tenney was staring at her with lacklustre eyes. In these latter days, the old mad spark in them had gone.

"Your baby," said Nan, feeling her heart beat hard, "isn't right. I know places where such poor little children are made—right—if they can be. They're studied and looked after. I want you to let me take him away with me and see if something can be done. His mother could go, too, if she likes. You could go. Only, I'll be responsible. I'll arrange it all."

Tenney still stared at her, and she found the dull gaze disconcerting.

"So," he said at length, not even glancing at Tira, "so she's put that into your head."

"So far as that goes," said Nan boldly, "I've put it into hers. I saw he wasn't right. I told her I'd do everything in my power, in anybody's power, to have him"—she hesitated here for a homely word he might take in—"seen to. And now (you're his father) I've come to you."

Tenney sat a long time, motionless, his eyes on the window at the end of the room where a woodbine spray was tapping, and again Nan became conscious of the increased tremor in Tira's frame. For now it seemed to have run over her and strangely to keep time to the woodbine spray outside. One would have said the woodbine, looking in, had, in a mad, irritating way, made itself the reflex of these human emotions within the room. Tenney spoke, drily yet without emphasis:

"Then he put ye up to this?"

"Who?" asked Nan.

For some obscure reason he would not mention Raven's name. But he spoke with a mildness of courtesy surprising to her and evidently the more alarming to Tira, for she shook the more and the vine appallingly knew and kept her company.

"I'm obleeged to ye," said Tenney. "But I don't want nothin' done for me nor mine. He's mine, ye see. He's in there asleep"—he pointed to the open bedroom door—"an' asleep or awake, he's mine, same's any man's property is his. An' if he ain't right, he ain't, an' I know why, an' it's the will o' the Lord, an' the Lord's will is goin' to be fulfilled now an' forever after, amen!"

The tang of scripture phrasing led him further to the channel his mind was always fumbling for.

"Do you," he asked Nan, not with any great show of fervor, but as if this were his appointed task, "do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ yet? Be ye saved?"

"Mr. Tenney," said Nan, "I don't care a scrap whether I'm saved or not, if I can make this world swing a little easier on its hinges." That seemed to her a figure not markedly vivid, and she continued. "It needs a sight of oiling. Don't you see it does? O, Mr. Tenney, think of the poor little boy that's got to live along"—the one phrase still seemed to her the best—"not right, and grow to be a man, and you may die and leave him, and his mother may die. What's he going to do then?"

"No," said Tenney quietly, with the slightest glance at Tira in her tremor there by the door, "I ain't goin' to die, not this v'y'ge. If anybody's goin' to, it ain't me."

"O Isr'el!" said Tira. Her voice rose scarcely above a whisper and she bent toward him in a beseeching way as if she might, in another instant, run to him. "You let him go. You an' me'll stay here together, long as we live. There sha'n't nothin' come betwixt us, Isr'el." In this Nan heard a hidden anguish of avowal. "But you let him go."

Tenney did not regard her. He spoke, pointedly to Nan:

"I'm obleeged to ye." He rose from his chair. He was dismissing her. His action approached a dignity not to be ignored, and Nan also rose.

"I sha'n't give it up," she said. "I shall come again."

She tried to smile at him with composure, including Tira in the friendliness of it, but Tira, oblivous of her, was staring at Tenney, and Nan found herself outside, trouble in her mind. Tira had not gone to the door with her. She had staid still staring, in that fixed interrogation, at Tenney. He looked at her now, met her eyes, and gave

a little grimace. He had done well, the movement said. He had seen through it all. He was pleased with himself. Now he spoke to her, so affably that she frowned with perplexity at finding him kind.

"'Tain't so terrible hard," said Tenney, "to see through folks, once ye set your mind on it. He started her out on that, he an' you together, mebbe. 'F I git rid o' the young one,' you says, 'I shall have more freedom to range round, outdoor.' Mebbe you said it to him. Mebbe he said it to you. Mebbe 'twas t'other one—Martin—that said it an' you took it up. No, 'tain't so hard to see through folks, once ye git a start."

He turned and took, with a difficulty half assumed, the few steps to the wood-box, selected a couple of sticks and, with a quiet deftness that seemed to indicate a mind bent only on the act itself, put them in the stove. Tira watched him, fascinated by him, the strength in abeyance, the wayward will. When he set on the stove cover, it seemed to break the spell of her rigidity and she turned, hurried into the scullery and came back. She had, he saw, a knife. That was not alarming. It was a small kitchen knife, but he recognized it as the one she made a great fuss about, asking him to sharpen it often and keeping it for special use. But she gripped it strangely. Besides, there was the strangeness of her face.

"Here! here!" he said. "What you doin' o' that knife?"

Tira was not thinking of him. She had gone, with her quick, lithe step, to the window where the vine was tapping, and thrown it up.

"Here!" he called again, his uneasiness shifting; whatever a woman was doing, with a face like that, she must be stopped. "What you openin' winders for, a day like this, coldin' off the room?"

Tira reached out and seized the woodbine spray, cut

it savagely and then shut the window. She came back with the spray in her hand, took off the stove cover and thrust it in, twining and writhing as if it had life and rebelled against the flame.

"There!" she said. "I ain't goin' to have no vines knockin' at winders an' scarin' anybody to death."

Then she went into the scullery and put the knife in its place, blade up in a little frame over the sink, and came back into the bedroom where the child was whimpering. She stayed there a long time, and Tenney stood where she left him, listening for her crooning song. When it began, as it did presently, he gave a nod of relief and started moving about the room. Once he went into the scullery, and Tira heard him pumping. But when she had got the child dressed, and had gone out there herself, to prepare the vegetables for dinner, she put her hand mechanically, without looking, on the rack above the sink. The hand knew what it should find, but it did not find it. The knife was gone. Tira stood a long time looking, not at the empty place, but down at her feet. It was not alarming to miss the knife. It was reassuring. It was not to be believed, yet she must believe it. Tenney was taking precautions. He was afraid.

Nan, halfway home, met Raven. He had been walking up and down, to meet her. Defeat, he saw, with a glance at her face.

"Yes," said Nan, coming up with him. "No go, Rookie. He was civil. But he was dreadful. I don't know whether I should have known it, but it's the way she looked at him. Rookie, she was scared blue."

Raven said nothing. He felt a poor stick indeed, to have brought Nan into it and given her over to defeat.

"Can't we walk a spell?" said she. "Couldn't we take the back road to the hut? I do so want to talk to you."

They turned back and passed the Tenneys' at a smart pace. Raven gave the house a swift glance. He was always expecting to hear Tira cry out, she who never did and who, he knew, would endure torture like an Indian. They turned into the back road where the track was soft with the latest snow, and came into the woods again opposite the hut. When they reached it and Raven put down his hand for the key, Nan asked:

"Does she come here often?"

"Not lately," he said, fitting the key in the lock. "She had rather a quiet time of it while he was lame."

They went in and Nan kept on her coat while he lighted the fire and piled on brush.

"Rookie," she said, when he had it leaping, "it's an awful state of things. The man's insane."

"No," said Raven, "I don't feel altogether sure of that. We're too ready to call a man insane, now there's the fashion of keeping tabs. Look at me. I do something outside the ordinary—I kick over the traces—and Milly says I'm to go to the Psychopathic. Dick more than half thinks so, too. Perhaps I ought. Perhaps most of us ought. We deflect just enough from what the majority are thinking and doing to warrant them in shutting us up. No, I don't believe you could call him insane."

They talked it out from all quarters of argument. Nan proposed emergency activities and Raven supplied the counter reason, always, he owned, going back to Tira's obstinacy. Nan was game to kidnap the child, even from Tira's arms. Couldn't be done, Raven told her. Not longer ago than yesterday, Tira would have consented, but now, he reminded her, Tenney's crazy mind was on him. Yes, it was a crazy mind, he owned, but Tenney was not on that account to be pronounced insane. He couldn't be shut up, at least without Tira's concurrence.

And she never would concur. She had, if you could put it so, an insane determination equal in measure to Tenney's insane distrust, to keep the letter of her word. Then, Nan argued, Tira and the child together must go back with her. To Tenney, used only to the remote reaches of his home, the labyrinth of city life was impenetrable. He couldn't possibly find them. He wouldn't be reasonable enough, intelligent enough, to take even the first step. And Raven could stay here and fight out the battle. Tenney wouldn't do anything dramatically silly. Tira was "'way off" in fearing that. He would only fix Raven with those unpleasant eyes and ask if he were saved. Very well, Raven agreed. It was worth trying. They must catch the first chance of seeing Tira alone.

Then, though his mind was on Tira, it reverted to Anne. Again she seemed to be inexorably beside him, reminding him, with that delicate touch of her invisible finger, that he was not thinking of her, not even putting his attention uninterruptedly on what she had bidden him do: her last request, he seemed to hear her remonstrating, half sighing it to herself, as if it were only one more of the denials life had made her. Even if he did not agree with her, in his way of taking things (throwing away his strength, persuading young men to throw away theirs, that the limited barbarism called love of country might be served) could he not act for her, in fulfilling her rarer virtue of universal love?

"I tell you what, Nan," he said, with a leap from Tira to the woman more potent now in her unseen might than she had ever been when her subtle ways of mastery had been in action before him, "it's an impossible situation."

How did she know he was talking, not of Tira but of Anne? Yet she did know. There had been a moment's pause and perhaps her mind leaped with his.

It was, she agreed, impossible. Yet, after all, so many things weren't, that looked so at the start. Think of surgery: the way they'd both seen men made over. Well! He didn't remind her that they had also seen a mountain of men, if fate had piled their bodies as high as it was piling the fame of their endeavor, who couldn't be made over.

"If we refuse her," he said—and though Nan was determined he should make his decision alone, she loved him for the coupling of their intent—"we seem to repudiate her. And that's perfectly devilish, with her where she is."

It was devilish, Nan agreed. Her part here seemed to be acquiescence in his attitude of mind, going step by step with him as he broke his path.

"And," said Raven, lapsing into a confidence he had not meant to make—for would Anne in her jealous possessiveness, allow him to share one intimate thought about her, especially with Nan?—"the strange part of it is, I do seem to feel she's somewhere. I seem to feel she's here. Reminding me, you know, just as a person can by looking at you, though he doesn't say a word. Have you felt that? Do you now?"

"No," said Nan, with her uncalculated decisiveness that made you sure she was not merely speaking the truth as she saw it, but that she did see it clearly. "I have felt it, though, about other people. About two or three of the boys over there, you know. They were the ones I knew rather well. And Old Crow! up here, Rookie, alone with you, I have that sense of Old Crow's being alive, very much alive. Is it the thoughts he's left behind him, written on the air, or is it really Old Crow?"

"The air's been changed a good many times since he was here," said Raven lightly. It was not good for little girls to be wrestling forever with things formless and dark.

"Oh," said she, "but there's something left. Our minds make pictures. They don't get rubbed out. Why, I can see old Billy Jones sitting here and Old Crow bandaging his legs, and your mother and little Jack coming up to bring things in a basket. You can say that's because Old Crow told it so vividly I can't get it out of my mind. But that isn't all. Things don't get rubbed out."

XXXV

The next day Raven saw Tenney driving by, probably to the street where all the neighbors went for supplies. Up to this time Jerry had offered, whenever he was going, to do Tira's "arrants," and Tenney had even allowed him to bring home grain. Raven at once summoned Nan. It was their chance. Tira must be taken by storm. Let her leave the house as it was and run away. Nan hurried on her things, and they went up the road.

"There she is," said Nan, "at the window."

Raven, too, saw her white face for the moment before it disappeared. She was coming, he thought, making haste to let them in. He knocked and waited. No one came. He knocked again, sharply, with his stick, and then, in the after silence, held his breath to listen. It seemed to him he had never heard a house so still. That was the way his mind absurdly put it: actively, ominously still.

"She was at the window," said Nan, in a tone that sounded to him as apprehensive as the beating of his own heart. "I saw her."

He knocked again and, after another interval, the window opened above their heads and Tira leaned over the sill.

"You go away," she said quietly, yet with a thrilling apprehension. "I can't let you in."

They stepped back from the door and looked up at her. She seemed even thinner than when Nan had seen her

last, and to Raven all the sorrows of woman were darkling in the anguish of her eyes. He spoke quietly, making his voice reassuring to her.

"Why can't you? Have you been told not to?"

"No," said Tira, quick, he thought, to shield her persecutor, "nobody's said a word. But they've gone off, an' you can't be certain when they'll be back."

"Hasn't he gone to the street?" Raven asked her, and now her voice, in its imploring hurry, could not urge him earnestly enough.

"He said he was goin'. You can't tell. He may turn round an' come back. An' I wouldn't have you here—either o' you—for anything in this world."

But though she said "either of you," her eyes were on Raven, beseeching him to go. He did not answer that. In a few words he set forth their plan. She was to take the child and come. It was to be now. But she would hardly listen.

"No," she called, in any pause between his words. "No! no! no!"

"Don't you want to save the child?" Raven asked her sternly. "Have you forgotten what may happen to him?"

She had her answer ready.

"It's his," she said. "He spoke the truth, though it wa'n't as he mean it. But the baby's his, an' baby as he is, an' *as* he is, he's got to fight it out along o' me. You go now, an' don't you come a-nigh me ag'in. An' if you stay here knockin' at my door, I'll scream so's I sha'n't hear you."

She withdrew her head from the window, but instantly looked out again.

"God Almighty bless you!" she said. "But you go! you go!"

"Tira!" called Raven sharply, "don't you know you're in danger? Don't you know if anything happens to you it'll——" He paused, and Nan wondered if he meant to say, "It will break my heart!" and scarcely felt the pain of it, she was so tense with misery for them both.

Tira leaned out again and seemed to bend even protectingly toward them. She smiled at them, and the softening of her face was exquisite.

"I ain't in danger," she said. "I've said things to him. He's afraid."

"Threatened him?" Raven asked.

"I've kep' tellin' him," said Tira, in that same tone of tender reasonableness such as mothers use when they persuade children to the necessities of things, "he must remember we ain't alone. An' somehow it seems to scare him. He don't see Him as I do: the Lord Jesus Christ."

She shut the window quietly, and Raven and Nan went away. They walked soberly home without a word, but when Nan was taking off her hat she heard bells and went to the library window. Raven was standing by the table, trying to find some occupation to steady his anxious mind.

"Look!" said Nan.

It was Tenney, and he was "whipping up."

"She knew, didn't she?" commented Nan, and he answered:

"Yes, she knew."

Here his trouble of mind broke forth. He had to be enlightened. A woman must guess what a woman thought.

"I can't understand her," he said. "I believe I have understood her, up to now. But to say the child's got to bear it with her! Why, a woman's feeling about her child! It's as old as the world. A woman will sacrifice herself, but she won't sacrifice her child."

He looked at her with such trouble in his face that Nan

had to turn away. He understood her too well. Could he read in her eyes what her mind had resolved not to tell him? Yet she would tell him. He shouldn't grope about in the dark among these mysteries. She wanted, as much as Old Crow wanted it, to be a light to his feet.

"She would," she told him quietly, "sacrifice herself in a minute. Only she can't do it the way we've offered her, because now you've come into it."

"I've been in it from the first," frowned Raven. "Ever since the day I found her up there in the woods."

"Yes, but then that poor crazy idiot was jealous only of him, the creature that sat down by her at prayer-meeting; and now he's jealous of you. And she's saving you, Rookie. At any risk. Even her own child."

Nan thought she could add what had been in her mind, keeping time to every step of the way home: "For now she loves you better than the child." But it proved impossible to say that, and she went out of the room, not looking at him, and only waiting to put away her hat and coat in the hall. She went upstairs with the same unhurried step and shut the door of her room behind her. She stood there near the door, as if she were guarding it against even the thoughts of any human creature. They must not get at her, those compassionate thoughts, not Charlotte's, certainly not Raven's. For at that moment Nan found herself a little absurd, as many a woman has who knows herself to be starving for a man's love. She began to tremble, and remembered Tira shaking there by the door that morning that seemed now years away. The tremor got hold of her savagely and shook her. It might have been shaking her in its teeth.

"Nervous chill!" said Nan to herself, insisting on saying it aloud to see if her teeth would actually chatter and finding they did. She had seen plenty of such nervous

whirlwinds among her boys and helped to quiet them. "I'm an interesting specimen," chattered Nan. "Talk about *cafard!*"

All that forenoon, Dick fretted about the house, waiting for her, hoping she would go to walk, let him read to her—Dick had a persistent habit of reading verse to you when he found you weren't likely to get into the modern movement by yourself—but no Nan. At dinner, there she was, rather talkative, in a way that took Amelia into the circle of intimacy, and seemed to link up everybody with everybody else in a nice manner. Nan had the deftest social sense, when she troubled herself to use it. Aunt Anne would have been proud of her.

XXXVI

Then everything, so far as Raven and Nan were concerned, quieted to an unbroken commonplace, and the four—for Amelia and Dick held to their purpose of "standing by"—again settled down to country life, full of the amenities and personal abnegations of a house party likely to be continued. Charlotte was delighted, in her brooding way, and ascribed the emotion to Jerry who, she said, "liked somethin' goin' on." Nan and Dick had vaulted back to their past: the old terms of a boy and girl intimacy in robust pursuits admitting much laughter and homespun talk. They went snowshoeing over the hills, Raven, though Nan begged him to come, electing to stay at home with Amelia, who would stand at the door to see them off, half persuaded she was up to going herself and, indeed, almost feeling she had gone, after considering it so exhaustively, and then retreating to the library where she was cramming for next year's economics. Raven was very good to her. He would sit down by the blazing hearth, listening with an outward interest to her acquired formulae of life, and then, after perfunctory assent or lax denial, retire to his own seclusion over a book. But he seldom read nowadays. He merely, in this semblance of studious absorption, found refuge from Amelia. He was mortally anxious for Tira, still face to face with brute irresponsibility, and when the mental picture of it flamed too lividly and could not be endured, he threw down his book and hurried up to the hut, to

find her. She never came. The fire, faithfully laid for her, was unlighted. The room breathed the loneliness of a place that has known a beloved presence and knows it no more. Nearly every day he and Nan had a word about her, and often he saw Nan going "up along" and knew she was, in the uneasiness of no news, bent on walking past the house, if only for a glance at the windows and the sight of Tira's face. Three times within a few weeks Tenney had driven past, and each time Nan, refusing Dick's company, hurried up the road. But she came back puzzled and dispirited, and called to Raven, who, in a fever of impatience, had gone out to meet her:

"No. The door is locked."

She would put a hand on his arm and they would walk together while she told him her unvarying tale. When she had knocked persistently, Tira would appear at the chamber window, and shake her head, and her lips seemed to be saying, "No! no! no!" And each time Tenney returned shortly, and they were sure his going was a blind. He never went to the street, and even Charlotte remarked the strangeness of his short absences.

"What under the sun makes Isr'el Tenney start out an' turn round an' come back ag'in?" she inquired of Jerry. "He ain't gone twenty minutes 'fore he's home."

Jerry didn't know. He " 'sposed Isr'el forgot suthin'."

How was Tira? Raven asked after Nan had seen her at the window, and she did not spare him. Pale, she said, paler than ever, a shadow of herself. But Nan had faith that her courage would hold. It was like the winter and the spring. Tenney stood for the forces of darkness, but the spring had to come in the end. Also she owned that her great reason for believing in Tira's endurance was that Tira was not alone. She had, like Old Crow, her sustaining symbol. She had, whatever the terrifying circum-

stance of her daily life, divine companionship. She had her Lord, Jesus Christ.

"I believe," said Raven abruptly, one day when they were tramping the snowy road and she was answering the panic of his apprehensive mind, "you swear by Old Crow's book."

"I do," said Nan simply, "seem to be hanging on to Old Crow. I've read it over and over. And it does somehow get me. Picture writing! And human beings drawing the lines and half the time not getting them straight! But if there's something to draw, I don't care how bad the drawing is. If there's actually something there! There is, Rookie. Tira's got hold of it because she's pure in heart. It's something real, and it'll see her through."

Raven was not content with its seeing her through until he could be told what the appointed end was likely to be. If Tira was to fight this desperate battle all her mortal life, he wasn't to be placated by the rewarding certainty of a heavenly refuge at the end.

"I can never," he said, "get over the monstrous queerness of it all. Here's a woman that's got to be saved, and she's so infernally obstinate we can't save her. When I think of it at night, I swear I'm a fool not to complain of the fellow in spite of her, and then in the morning I know it can't be done. She'd block me, and I should only have got her in for something worse than she's in for now."

"Yes," said Nan, "she'd block you. Wait, Rookie. Something will happen. Something always does."

Yes, Raven thought, something always does, and sometimes, in country tragedies, so brutal a thing that the remorseful mind shudders at itself for not preventing it. But Nan, equably as she might counsel him, was herself apprehensive. She expected something. She had a sense

of waiting for it. Dick must be prepared. He must be found on their side. Whatever the outcome, Raven must not suffer the distrust and censure of his own house.

Dick had been reading to her by the fire while Raven was taking Amelia for a sober walk. Nan wished Dick wouldn't read his verse to her. It made her sorry for him. What was he doing, a fellow who had seen such things, met life and death at their crimson flood, pottering about in these bizarre commonplaces of a literary jog-trot? They sounded right enough, if you stood for that kind of thing, but they betrayed him, his defective imagination, his straining mind. He didn't see the earth as it was. He was so enamored of metaphorical indirection that he tried to see everything in the terms of something else. But to-day she had her own thoughts. She sat staring into the fire, her cheeks burned by the leaping heat, and Dick, looking up at her, stopped on an uncompleted line.

"You haven't," he said, "heard a word."

"Not much of it," said Nan. She looked at him disarmingly. When her eyes were like that, Dick's heart was as water. "I was thinking about Tira."

He had to place this. Who was Tira?

"Oh," said he, "the Tenney woman. Jack needn't have dragged you into that. It's a dirty country story."

"Not dirty," said Nan. "You'd love it if you'd thought of it yourself. You'd write a play about it."

Dick frowned.

"Well, I didn't think of it," said he, "and if I had, I shouldn't be eating and sleeping it as you and Jack are. Whatever's happening up there, it isn't our hunt. It's hers, the woman's. Or the authorities'. The man ought to be shut up."

Nan began telling him how it all was, how they wanted definitely to do the right thing and how Tira herself

blocked them. Dick listened, commended the drama of it, and yet found it drama only.

"But it's a beastly shame," he commented, "to have this come on Jack just now when he isn't fit."

Nan had her sudden hot angers.

"Do you mean to tell me," she countered, "you believe that now, now you've lived with him and seen he's exactly what he used to be, only more darling—you believe he's broken, dotty? Heavens! I don't know what you'd call it."

Dick did not answer. He scarcely heard. One word only hit him like a shot and drew blood.

"Stop that!" he ordered.

They faced each other with eyes either angry or full of a tumultuous passion an onlooker would have been puzzled to name.

"Stop what?"

"Calling him darling. I won't have it."

Nan found this truly funny, and broke into a laugh.

"Do you know," she said, "how every talk of ours ends? Rookie! It always comes round to him. I call him darling and you won't have it. But you'll have to."

"No," said Dick, "I won't have it. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. You little devil! I believe you do it to work me up. That's all right if it stopped there. But it won't. Some day he'll hear you and then——!"

She was flaming again.

"Hear me? Hear me call him darling? Why, he's heard it so often it's no more to him than your calling him Jack. But if he asked me what I meant by it! do you know what would happen then?"

"What would?"

"Then," said Nan enigmatically, "I should tell him, that's all."

She would say no more, though he hurled questions at her, and hardly remembered afterward what they were. He was of an impression that he begged her to love him, to marry him, though Dick, prodigal as he was of great words in his verse, scarcely believed he used them in the direct address of love-making. But certainly he did beg her, and Nan was gentle with him, though always, like Tira, as she remembered afterward, repeating, "No! no!" At the end, his passion softened into something appealing, as if they were together considering the sad case he found himself in and he depended on her to help him through.

"Nan," he said, in the boyish way she loved, "don't you see it's got to be in the end? We've always been together, We're always going to be. Don't you see, old Nan?"

Nan smiled at him, brilliantly, cruelly, he thought. But she was sorry for him, and it was only a show of cruelty. It came out of her kindness, really. Dick mustn't suffer so for want of her. Bully him, abuse him, anything to anger him and keep him from sheer weak, unavailing regret. Nan had a great idea of what men should be: "tough as a knot," she thought, seasoned all through. If they whimpered, she was aghast.

"No," she said again, with the brilliant smile, "no! no! I can't. I won't. Not unless"—and this, too, was calculated cruelty—"unless Rookie tells me to."

They sat staring at each other as if each wondered what the outcome was to be. Nan was excitedly ready for it. Or had the last word been actually said? But Dick altogether surprised her. He got up and stood looking down at her in a dignity she found new to him.

"When you come to me," he said, "you'll come because I ask you. It won't be because any other man tells you to."

He walked past her, out of the room. Did he, Nan

wondered, in her ingenuous surprise, look a very little like Rookie? When he was twenty years older, was he going to look as Rookie did now? His expression, that is. For, after all, there was Dick's nose.

And in these days what of Tira? She, too, was on an edge of nervous apprehension. Tenney was about the house a great deal. He still made much of his lameness, though never in words. Every step he took seemed an implication that a cane was far from sufficient. He needed his crutch. And as the period of his silence lengthened, Tira was driven by her fear to another greater fear: that she might mention it herself. What if she should tell him how the crutch, leaning there at the foot of the bed, had seemed to her a weapon, not a crutch? What if she appealed to his pity and even played a part with him, dwelling on her woman's weakness of nature, her tremors, deprived of the protection that should be hers? Artifice was foreign to her. Yet what was there, short of implicating Raven, she would not do for the child? But a glance at Tenney's face, the tightness of reserve, the fanatical eyes, closed her lips, and they moved about together dumbly at their common tasks. As she grew paler and the outline of her cheek the purer over the bones beneath, he watched her the more intently, but still furtively. One forenoon when the sky was gray and a soft snow fell in great flakes that melted as they came, he went haltingly up to the shed chamber and came down with his gun. He was not a huntsman, and when they moved into the house it had been left there with a disorder of things not likely to be needed. He drew a chair to the table and then addressed her almost urbanely. He wanted, she guessed, to call her attention in some explicit way.

"You git me some kind of a rag," he bade her. "I'm goin' to clean up this old musket. You might's well hand

me that oiler, too, off'n the sink shelf. I can't git about any too well."

She brought him the cloth and the oiler and went away to the sink again, determined not to be drawn into any uneasiness of questioning. But it fascinated her, the sight of him bending to his task, and her will weakened. In spite of herself, she went over to the table and stood looking down at him. Presently he glanced up at her and smiled a little in a way she did not like. It seemed to imply some recognition of a common knowledge between them. He had, the look said, more than the apparent reason for what he was doing. The oiling of the gun was not all. Something at the back of his mind was more significant than this act of his hands, and this something, the look said, she also knew. All through the moment of her gazing down at him Tira was telling herself she must not speak. Yet she spoke:

"You goin' gunnin'?"

"I dunno but I be," he returned, his eyes again on his work. "I've had it in mind quite a spell, an' I dunno's there's any reason for puttin' on't off."

"What you goin' after, Isr'el?" she asked, against her will, and he was silent for what seemed so long, that she pursued: "You goin' rabbitin'?"

"No," said Tenney. "I dunno's I be. What's the use o' shootin' down four-footed creatur's? T'other ones'll do well enough for me."

Again he glanced up at her and her look of frozen horror evidently warned him against terrifying her unduly. She must be shaken enough to obey him, not to fight.

"You look kinder peaked," he said, with what she found a false air of interest. "You don't git out enough. Mebbe you'd ought to git out nights. I've been noticin' how peaked you look, an' I thought mebbe I'd git the old

musket loaded up an' go out an' shoot ye a pa'tridge. Tempt your appetite, mebbe, a mite o' the breast."

"I dunno," said Tira, speaking with difficulty through her rigid misery, "as you'd ought to, so near nestin' time. I dunno's as it's the season to kill."

"All seasons are the same to me," said Tenney. "When it's time to kill, then kill, I say. Kill!"

He spoke the word as if he loved it, and Tira walked away from him into the bedroom, and stretched herself on the bed, her hand on the sleeping child. When it was time to get dinner she came out again and found him reading his paper by the stove. He had set the gun away in a corner. But directly after dinner he shaved at the little glass by the kitchen window and told her, again with the air of abundant explanation she found foreign to him, that he was going to the street, to get the colt shod. The colt did need to be shod. She knew that. Perhaps this time he was actually going.

"You want to take along the eggs?" she said, and he assented.

He asked her, too, for a list of groceries she needed. He would have to wait his turn at the blacksmith's. He might be a long time. She need not expect him before dark. She might as well go out, he told her, and again:

"You're lookin' peaked. You need the air."

She heard him drive briskly out of the yard, but she would not, for some reason she did not herself know, go to the window to look after him. It was all a plan, she told herself. She was not to be taken in by it. She would force herself to sit down to her sewing. She would not leave the house while he was gone. If he wanted to tempt her out, to trap her, let him have his will. It was better, she thought, with a moment's satirical comment, for him to be driving off on a fictitious mission than roaming

the neighborhood with a gun in his hand. She glanced involuntarily at the corner where the gun had stood not many minutes before he left the house. It was gone. Then she knew. She threw down her work, went to the telephone, and called Raven. He was there, and she felt her heart answer wildly when, at her first word, he broke in:

"Is it you?" Not her name, only the intimacy of the significant word. "The hut?" he added.

"Up there," said Tira, breathless. "Both of you. I've got to see you both. Come quick."

She got her cloak and threw it down again, remembering it was what she was used to wearing and that Tenney would most certainly recognize her outline in it, even though a long way off. Grandmother Tenney's black blanket shawl was in the parlor chest of drawers, that and her hood, disfiguring ancientry of dress. She ran into the parlor, snatched them out, tied on the black knitted hood and, not unfolding the shawl, wrapped it about her shoulders. The baby was in his cradle, and she gave him one glance. If he waked, he would cry. Let him cry. But she did lock the door behind her, and put the key on the sill, a place Tenney would know. Half way down the path, she went back, took the key again and dropped it into her apron pocket. Tenney might come, but he should not go into the house and find the child alone. Lest he should come the way he went, she took the back road, and there, when she was about to turn into the wood road, she heard sleigh-bells behind her, the horse going, as her ear told her, "step and step." But she was actually on the wood road when the driver whipped up and the bells came clashingly. She did not turn to look. It was not Tenney. She would have known his bells. The horse drew up, the driver called to him a peremptory and jovial

word, and she knew the voice. It was Eugene Martin's, and instinct told her to stop and face him. He stepped out of the sleigh and threw the robe, with a quick motion, over the horse. Then he came on to her, smiling, effusively cordial, and Tira waited. A pace away he took off his hat and made her an exaggerated bow. He was carefully dressed, but then he was always that, according to his lights. Only Tira, who knew him so well, all his vain schemes of personal fitness, judged this to be a day of especial preparation. For what? He took the step between them and put out both hands.

"If this ain't luck!" he beamed. "How are you, girl? I made up my mind I'd see you, but I hadn't an idea you'd be on the road."

Tira rolled her hands in her apron, as if they were cold. His extended hands she did not seem to see.

"I ain't waitin' for you," she said quietly, her eyes on his. "You better go right straight along about your business an' leave me to mine."

"I ain't done right, Tira," said Martin, with the specious warmth she knew. "I did try to git you in bad with Tenney, but don't you know what that sprung from? I'm jealous as the devil. Don't you know I be?"

"You've no call to be jealous nor anything else," said Tira steadily. "You an' me are as fur apart"—she hesitated for a word, and her eyes rested for a moment on one of the tall evergreens moving slightly in the breeze. "We couldn't any more come together than I could climb up to the pick o' that pine tree."

He still regarded her solicitously. He was determined not to abandon his part.

"Ain't somebody come betwixt us?" he demanded, with that vibration of the voice once so moving to her. "You can't deny it. Can you now?"

"Nobody's come betwixt us," said Tira. "If you was the only man on this earth to-day, I'd run from you as I would a snake. I hate you. No, I don't. I look on you as if you was the dirt under my feet."

But as she said it she glanced down, wistfully troubled, as if she begged forgiveness of the good earth. The quick anger she knew in him flared like a licking flame. He threw his arms about her and held her to him as tightly, it seemed to her, as if he were hostile to the very breath within her body. And she was still, not only because he gripped her so but because she had called upon that terrible endurance women recognize within themselves. He kissed her, angry, insulting kisses she could bear more patiently than the kisses of unwelcome love. But as his lips defiled her face, he was suddenly aware that it was wet. Great tears were rolling down her cheeks. He laughed.

"Cryin'?" he jeered. "Poor little cry-baby! wipe her eyes."

While he held her with one arm, the other hand plunged into her apron pocket and brought out her handkerchief. It also touched the key. His instincts, she knew, had a scope of devilish cunning, and at once he knew what key it was. He laughed. Looking off through the trees, he had seen what gave him another clue.

"Smoke!" he called, as if he shouted it to an unseen listener who might not have been clever enough to guess. "Smoke from that shack Raven lazes round in same as Old Crow did afore him. That's where you were goin'. The wood road all broke out for you. I might ha' known it when I see that. Go along, my lady. He'll be there waitin' for you. Go along. But jest for the fun o' the thing, you leave the key with me."

She answered with a desperate wrench; but though one

of her hands reached the pocket where the key lay, she could only twitch the fingers, and while he laughed softly he pulled the tie of her apron and, releasing her with a little push, snatched the apron from her, rolled it and thrust it into his pocket. She sprang at him, but he gave her another push that sent her staggering and ran laughing to the sleigh.

"So long!" he called back at her.

She recovered herself and started after him. But the horse plunged forward and Martin was shouting at her jovially, in what words she did not hear. She only knew, through the bewilderment of her despair, that the tone was merciless.

She stood there a moment, looking after him, and realizing that he had forced her into a corner from which there was no possible way out. But then another fear beat in her numbed brain. She had not accomplished the task for which she came here. Martin and his trick must wait. That other need was more important. There was the hut and its welcoming smoke and there Raven must be looking for her. She started running along the snowy path, reached the door, found it unlocked and went in.

XXXVII

Raven, as soon as he had Tira's message, went to find Nan. She was not in her room, but Charlotte, when he finally brought up at the kitchen, told him Nan and Dick had gone to walk. Down the road, she said. They had called to him, but he was in the barn.

"Then," said Raven, getting into his jacket, "see her the minute she comes back and send her up to the hut."

Yes, Charlotte meant to be in the kitchen all the afternoon. She would see Nan. Raven left the house and hurried up the hill. He found the hut in order, the fire laid as he had left it. That was, foolishly, always a surprise. Her presence hung so inevitably about the place that he was taken aback to find no visible sign of it. Now when she appeared it was breathlessly, not, as he thought, from haste, but from her encounter with Martin. And she came stripped of her reserves, the decorum of respectful observance she always kept toward him. At first glance he was shocked by the change in her appearance and could not account for it, not knowing he missed the familiar folds of the blue cloak about her, not seeing that her black shawl and the knitted hood accentuated the tragic paleness of her face. She came straight to him and he took her hands and, finding them so cold, held them in one of his and chafed them. This she did not notice. She neither knew that they were cold nor that he was holding them.

"You must go away," she said, surprising him because

he thought she had come to say she herself was ready to go. "Where is she?" Tira asked, with a quick glance about the room, as if the least deviation in her plan fretted her desperately. "I depended on seein' her."

"Nan?" asked Raven. "I couldn't find her. What is it, Tira?"

"She'd ha' helped me out," said Tira despairingly. "She'd ha' seen you've got to go away from here an' go quick. Couldn't you pack up an' git off by the nine o'clock?"

"Don't be foolish," said Raven. He released her hands and drew a chair nearer the fire. "Sit down. I haven't the least idea of going anywhere. Do you suppose I should go and leave you in danger?"

But she did not even seem to see the chair he had indicated or the fire. She stood wringing her hands, in a regardless way, under her shawl, and looking at him imploringly.

"I ain't in any danger," she said, "not compared to what you be. He's stopped dwellin' on that man an' his mind is on you."

The shame of this did not move her now. Her fear had burned every reticence to ashes and her heart looked out nakedly.

"He's got out the old gun," she went on. "I dunno's he's fired a gun sence we've been here unless it might be at a hawk sailin' over. He says he's goin' to shoot me a pa'tridge—for me! a pa'tridge for me to eat!—an' he looked at me when he said it, an' the look was enough. You go. You go to-night an' put the railroad betwixt you an' me."

"Don't be foolish, Tira," said Raven again. "I've been in more dangerous places than this, and run bigger risks than Tenney's old musket. That's all talk, what he says

to you, all bluff. I begin to think he isn't equal to anything but scaring a woman to death. "But"—now he saw his argument—"I will go. Nan and I will go to-night, but only if you go with us. Now is your chance, Tira. Run back to the house and get the boy. Bring him here, if you like, to stay till train time and then come."

He stretched out his hand to her and waited, his eyes on hers. Would she put her hand into his in obedience, in fealty? She began to cry, silently yet rendingly. He saw the great breaths rising in her, and was sick at heart to see her hand—the hand she should have laid in his—clutching her throat to still its agony.

"I dunno," she said brokenly. "Yes, I s'pose I do know. I've got to do it. It's been pushin' me an' pushin' me, an' now I've got to give up beat. You won't save yourself, an' somehow or another you've got to be saved."

Raven felt the incredible joy of his triumph. He had yielded to her obstinacy, he had actually given up hope, and now, scourged by her devotion to him, she was walking straight into the security he had urged upon her. Yet he dared not betray his triumph, lest outspoken emotion of any sort should awaken her to a fear of—what? Of him? Of man's nature she had learned to abhor?

"That's right, Tira," he said quietly. "Now you've given up responsibility. You've put yourself and the boy in my hands, mine and Nan's. You've promised, remember. There's no going back."

Still he held out his hand, and though she ignored it, her dumbly agonized look was aware of it. It was waiting for her, the authoritative, kind hand, and she took hers from her throat and laid it in his grasp. Tira seemed to herself to be giving up something she had been fighting to keep. What was she giving up? Nothing it was right to keep, she would have said. For at that minute, as it had

been in all the minutes that led to it, she believed in him as she did in her Lord, Jesus Christ. Yet she was aware, with that emotional certainty which is more piercing than the keenness of the most brilliant mind, that she had surrendered, the inner heart of her, and whatever he asked her to do would now be humbly done.

In the instant of their standing there, hand clasped in hand, the current of life between them rushed to mingle —humble adoration in her, a triumphant certainty in him. But scarcely had the impetuous forces met before they were dissolved and lost. The sharp crack of a gun broke the stillness outside, and Tira tore her hand from his and screamed piercingly. She threw herself upon Raven, holding him with both hands.

"Hear that!" she whispered. "It's right outside here. He's shot to make you come out an' see what 'tis. In the name o' God, don't you open the door."

Raven shook himself free from her, and then, because she was sobbing wildly, took her by the shoulders and pushed her into the chair by the hearth.

"Stop that," he said sternly. "Stay there till I come back."

He took the key from the lock, opened the door and stepped out. There lay Dick on his face, his head close by the door-stone, and Tenney, gun in hand, stood stupidly staring at him.

"I shot at a pa'tridge," Tenney babbled, "I shot——"

But Raven was kneeling by Dick in the reddening snow.

XXXVIII

Eugene Martin had driven at a quick pace through the back road and down again to the point where it met the highway. He had stuffed Tira's apron into his pocket, and through his passion he was aware of it as something he could use, how he did not yet know. But the key: that was a weapon in itself. She could not get into her house without it. Tenney could not get in. So far as Tira was concerned, it was lost, and Tenney would have to be told. And as he turned into the other road, there was Tenney himself driving toward home, and Martin knew what he was to do.

"Hi!" he called, but Tenney did not stop. He drew out slightly to the side of the road, the implication that Martin might pass. Martin drove up alongside and, the way growing narrower, seemed bent on crowding him. The horses were abreast and presently the road narrowed to a point where, if they continued, one would be in the ditch.

"I've got something o' yourn," called Martin. He was good humor itself. The chances of the road had played patly into his hand. "Anyways, I s'pose 'tis. I come across your woman on the back road. She turned into the loggin' road, to Raven's shack. She dropped her apron an' I picked it up. There's a key in the pocket. Looks like a key to somebody's outer door. Yourn, ain't it? Here 'tis, rolled up in the apron. Ketch!"

He had taken out the apron, rolled it tighter and then,

as Tenney made no movement, tossed it into the sleigh. He shook the reins and passed, narrowly escaping an over-turn, but, at the same moment, he was aware that Tenney had stooped slightly and lifted something. It was a familiar motion. What had he lifted? It could not be a gun, he told himself. Yet he knew it could be nothing else. Was this the next move in the mad game? For the first time he began to wonder whether Tenney's religion would really keep him cool and questioned whether, having neatly balanced his own account, he might close it now before he found himself in danger. Driving fast, he was aware that Tenney, behind him, was also coming on. But he would not look until he had passed Tenney's house, and then he did give one backward glance. Tenney had turned into the yard, and Martin relaxed, satisfied with the day's job. Perhaps it was really finished, and he and Tira were square.

Tenney, having driven into the yard, blanketed the horse and thrust the apron under the seat of the sleigh. He stood for a moment, thinking. Should he unlock the door, go into the house, and lock it against the woman who had run away to Raven's shack? He could not think clearly, but it did seem to him best to open the door and look about. How had she left things behind her? Was her absence deliberately planned? Inside, he proceeded mechanically with the acts he would ordinarily have done after an absence. The familiar surroundings seemed to suggest them to him. He fitted the key into the lock again, took off his great-coat and hung it up, chiefly because the nail reminded him, and then, the house suddenly attacking him with all the force of lonely silence, he turned and went out again and shut the door behind him. There was the horse. Why had he covered him? He would naturally have unharnessed. But then he saw the

gun in the sleigh, and that, like the silent house, seemed to push him on to something he had lost the power to will, and he took the gun and walked fast out of the yard. Now at once he felt clear in the head. He was going to find Raven. That was the next step. Wherever Raven was, he must find him. But when he turned out of the yard to go up the back road, he was aware of a strange dislike to coming upon him at the hut. Tira was there, he knew, but if Raven also was, then there would be something to do. It was something in the back of his mind, very dark and formless as yet, but it was, he told himself again, something that had to be done. Perhaps after all, even though it was to be done sometime, it need not be today. Even though Tira was up there, the job was a terrifying one to tackle when he felt so weak in his disabled foot, so cold after Martin's jeering voice when he tossed over the key. He turned again and went down the road to Raven's. His foot ached badly, but he did not mind it so much now, the confusion and pain of his mind had grown so great. It seemed, like this doubt that surrounded Tira, a curse that was to be always with him. At Raven's, he went to the kitchen door and knocked, and Charlotte came.

"He to home?" he asked, not looking at her, but standing there a drooping, miserable figure.

"Jerry?" she asked. "Yes. He's in the barn, gone to feed an' water."

"No," said Tenney. "John Raven. Is he to home?"

"Why, no," said Charlotte. "Not round the house. He said he's goin' up to the hut."

At that he stared at her desperately, as if begging her to take back her words; they might have been a command to him, a verdict against him. She stepped out a pace.

"Why, Mr. Tenney," she said, "what you round with a

gun for, this time o' night? You can't see nothin'. It'll be dusk in a minute."

"Pa'tridges," he called back to her, adding darkly, "I guess I can see well enough, come to that."

Charlotte stood there watching him out of the yard and noted that he turned toward home. When Nan and Dick came up the road the other way, she had gone in, and they had been in the house five minutes or more before she knew of it. Then Dick wandered into the kitchen, on one of the vague quests always bringing the family there in search of her, and she called to him from the pantry:

"D'you see anything of Isr'el Tenney on the road?"

No, Dick had seen nobody. He stood leaning against the casing, watching her floury hands at their deft work.

"He come here, not ten minutes ago," said Charlotte, "after your Uncle John. He had a gun. I never see Isr'el Tenney with a gun. 'Pa'tridge shootin,' he said. Pa'tridges, when you can't see your hand afore you in the woods! I told him Uncle John'd gone up to the hut. When Uncle John went off, he said he wanted Nan should come up there, quick as ever she could. You tell her, won't you? I forgot."

Then Dick knew. Tira was up there. And Tenney was out with a gun: New England tragedy. It was impossible, the sanctimonious Tenney. Yet there was New England tragedy, a streak of it, darkly visible, through all New England life. It would be ridiculous: old Tenney with his prayer-meetings and his wild appeals. And yet, he reflected, all tragedy was ridiculous to the sane, and saw before his mind's eye a satiric poem wherein he should arraign the great sad stories of the world and prove their ironic futility. But all this was the hurried commentary of the mind really bent on something actual, and from that actuality he spoke:

"Don't tell Nan, Charlotte. I'll see what he wants."

He went off and Charlotte thought he was right, the afternoon waning as it was. She would tell Nan later, a good deal later, when Raven and Dick had had time to come down again. And this was how Dick climbed the slope and was approaching the door of the hut when Tenney stole behind him through the dusk and fired.

Raven, in the instant of seeing Dick there on the ground, locked the door of the hut, dropped the key in his pocket, knelt by him and, with a hand on his pulse, snapped out his orders to Tenney, standing there staring vacuously:

"Go down to the house. Get Jerry and the sled. Come back with him. Get a move on. Run!"

Tenney continued looking emptily at him, still babbling about pa'tridges, and Raven got up and wrenched the gun from his hand, calling loudly, though they were close together:

"Don't you hear me? Get Jerry and the sled. Run, man, run."

Tenney started away in a dazed indecisiveness and Raven remembered his hurt and that he probably could not run. At the same instant Tenney's mind cleared. He was plunging down the slope and, whatever anguish it caused him, insensible to it.

Raven unlocked the door, stepped in and found Tira facing him.

"Go home," he said. "Get the boy and go down to my house. You're to stay there now."

At the instant of saying this, he set the gun inside the door, snatched some blankets from the bedroom and came out again. Tira stepped aside to let him pass. It looked as if he would have walked over her. He covered Dick warmly, picked up the boy's glasses from the snow and

dropped them into his pocket. With that involuntary act, the emotional assault of the whole thing nearly had him. He remembered Dick's eyes as he had sometimes seen them without their glasses, wistful and vaguely soft. Always his eyes, denuded of the lenses behind which they lived, had a child's look of helpless innocence, and here he was floored by life's regardless cruelty. Though, if he was not only floored but actually done for, he was not yet the one to suffer. He was away in that sanctuary of the assaulted body known as unconsciousness, and Raven did not dwell for more than an instant on "the pity of it" all.

Tira had come out of the hut and, at sight of Dick under his mound of covering, she gave a little cry and stooped to him with outstretched hand, perhaps with an idea of somehow easing him. But Raven caught her wrist before she touched him.

"Don't," said he. "I've sent down for the sled."

"Is he——?" she whispered, stepping back as he released her.

"I don't know," said he. "You can't do anything. Don't stay here."

But she stood still, staring down at the mound of blankets and Raven again on his knees beside it, his fingers on Dick's wrist.

"Didn't you hear me?" said he curtly. "You're to get the child and come to my house for the night."

"Will he"—and now he saw her mind was with Tenney —"will he be arrested?"

"I hope," Raven allowed himself the bitterness of saying, "I hope he'll get imprisonment for life."

And there was such sternness in the kind voice that Tira turned and went, half running, up the path to the back road and home.

That night at eleven, when the house had quieted, and Raven was alone in the library, he permitted himself a glimpse at the denied emotional aspect of the day. Jerry had got quickly to the top of the hill and Dick had been moved down without disaster, Tenney, white-faced and bewildered, lending his strength as he was told. Raven called upon him for this and that, and kept him by them on the way down to the house, so that Tira might have time to snatch the child and hurry away. At the moment of nearing the house he remembered her, and that if Tenney went directly back by the high road, he might meet her.

"Here!" This to Tenney, who was sagging on behind the sled, and who at once hurried along to his side. "Go back to the hut and see if I've left the key in the door. If it's there, you can lock up and bring it down to me. If it isn't, don't come back."

Then, he assumed, Tenney would go home by the back road, the shortest route. For he would not find the key, which was still in Raven's pocket. Tenney looked at him, seemed to have something to say, and finally managed it. As Raven remembered, it was something about pa'tridges and his gun. Whether he was shaken by fright, one could not have told, but he was, as Charlotte remarked upon it afterward, "all to pieces." Raven ignored the mumble, whatever it was, and Tenney, finally understanding that he might as well be as far off the earth as Dick, for all the attention anybody was going to pay him, turned, limping, and then Raven, with that mechanical sensitiveness to physical need always awake in him now, caught up a stick lying in the dooryard and tossed it to him.

"Here!" said he. "That'll do for a cane."

Tenney could not catch; he was too stupid from bewil-

derment of mind. But he picked it up, and went limping off across the road and up the hill. Then the women had to be told, and when Jerry brought the horses to a standstill at the door, Raven ran in, pushing Charlotte aside—dear Charlotte! she was too used to life and death to need palliatives of indirection in breaking even such news as this—and believed now, as he thought it over, that he met Milly and Nan, who had seen their approach, running to meet him, and that he said something about accident and, as if it were an echo of Tenney, a fool shooting partridges. Milly, shocked out of her neat composure, gave a cry, but Nan turned on her, bade her be quiet, and called Charlotte to the bedroom to get it ready. It was Milly's room, but the most accessible place. Raven telephoned for the doctor at the street and called a long-distance for a Boston surgeon of repute, asking him to bring two nurses; and he and Nan rapidly dressed the wound, with Dick still mercifully off in the refuge called unconsciousness. Raven remembered that Milly, as she got in his way, kept telling him she ought to have taken a course in first aid, and that Dick was her son and if a mother didn't know, who did? But he fancied he did not answer at all, and that he and Nan worked together, with quick interrogative looks at each other here and there, a lifted eyebrow, a confirming nod. And now the local doctor had arrived, had professed himself glad his distinguished colleague had been summoned and approved Raven's work. He was gone in answer to another urgent call, and the surgeon had not come, could not come for hours. But Dick was conscious, though either too weak or too wisely cautious to lift an eyelid, and Nan was with him. That Raven had ordered, and told Milly she was to come to the library after Jerry moved her things upstairs and she was settled for the night.

Milly was badly shaken. She looked, her strained eyes and mouth compressed, as if not only was she robbed of the desire of sleep, but had sworn never, in her distrust of what life could do to her, to sleep again. But she had not appeared, and as Raven sat there waiting for her, Charlotte came down the stairs and glanced in, a comprehensive look at the light, the fire, and at him, as if to assure him, whatever the need in the sick room, she kept him also in mind. Raven signed to her and she nodded. He had a question to ask. It had alternated in his mind with queer little heart-beats of alarm about Dick: hemorrhage, shock, hemorrhage—recurrent beats of prophetic disaster.

"Have you seen Tira?" he asked. "I told her to come here and stay till we could get her off somewhere."

Then he remembered that, so wide-reaching did Charlotte always seem to him in her knowledge of the life about her, he had not explained why Tira must be got out of the way, and that also was before him. But in her amazing habit of knowing, she knew.

"No," she said, "she ain't b'en near. She won't leave Tenney. She's one o' them that sticks by."

Immediately he was curious to hear what she had imagined, how she knew. Was the neighborhood awake to even the most obscure local drama? While Tira thought she was, at the expense of her own safety, covering Tenney's wildness of jealousy, were they all walking in the sun?

"Who told you?" he asked her.

"Why, nobody," said Charlotte. "It didn't take no tellin'. Jerry heard him hollerin' after her that day you was up in the woods, an' when you kep' the loggin' road broke, I knew you was givin' her some kind of a hole to creep into."

So they had known, she and Jerry. But they had not told. They would never tell.

"One thing," said Charlotte, smoothing her apron and looking at him in an anxious interrogation, "what be we goin' to say? That was the first thing doctor asked: 'Who done it?' (You know I let him in.) ' 'Twas a poor crazed creatur,' says I, 'after pa'tridges.' I was goin' to say Dick had a gun an' tripped up over a root; but that never'd do in the world, shot in the back so."

"The partridges'll do for the present," said Raven grimly. "He's certainly crazy enough. He said he was shooting partridges. We'll take it at that."

Charlotte went on, and he sat thinking. So Tira had chosen not to come. So fixed was his mind on the stern exigency of the situation, as it now stood, that her disobedience in itself irritated him. The right of decision, as he reasoned, had passed out of her hands into his. He was, in a sense, holding the converging lines of all this sudden confusion; he was her commanding officer. At that moment, when he was recognizing his anger against her and far from palliating, cherishing it as one of the tools in his hand, to keep him safely away from enfeebling doubt, Milly came noiselessly down the stairs. She would, he realized, in her unflinching determination to do the efficient thing, be as silent as a shadow. She appeared in the doorway, and her face, her bearing, were no longer Milly's. This was a paper semblance of a woman, drawn on her lines, but made to express grief and terror. Quiet as she was, the shock had thrown her out of her studied calm. She was elemental woman, despising the rigidities of training, scourged into revolt. Even her dress, though fitted to the technical needs of the hour, was unstudied. Her hair, ordinarily waved, even in the country, by the intelligence of her capable fingers, was

twisted in a knot on the back of her head. Raven, so effective had been the success of her ameliorating devices, thought Milly's hair conspicuously pretty. But now there was a little button of it only, as if she had prepared for exacting service where one displaced lock might undo her. A blue silk negligée was wrapped about her, with a furled effect of tightening to the blast, and her face was set in a mask of grief that was not grief alone, but terror. She came in and sat down in one of the chairs by the hearth, not relaxing in the act, but as if she could no longer stand.

"John!" she said, in a broken interrogation. "John!"

He got up and elaborately tended the fire, laying the sticks together with an extreme care, and thinking, as he did it, by one of those idle divagations of the mind, like a grace note on the full chord of action, that a failing fire had helped a man out of more than one hole in this disturbing life. It gave your strung nerves and rasped endurance a minute's salutary pause. He put down the tongs and returned to his chair.

"Buck up, Milly," said he. "Everything's being done. Now it'll be up to Dick."

But he realized, as if it were another trial setting upon him at the moment when he had borne enough, that his eyes were suddenly hot. This was not for Milly, not for himself. Again, for some obscure reason, he saw Dick's eyes, softened, child-like, as he had recalled them without their glasses. Through these past weeks of strain, he had been irritated with the boy, he had jeered at him for the extravagances of his gusty youth. Why, the boy was only a boy, after all! But Milly, leaning forward to the fire, her trembling hands over the blaze, was talking with amazing intensity, but still quietly, not to disturb the stillness of the expectant house. For the house, suddenly

changed, seemed itself to be waiting, as houses do in time of trouble. Was it for Dick to die or to take on life again? Houses are seldom kind at such times, even in their outward tranquillity. They are sinister.

And when Milly began to speak, Raven found he had to deal with a woman surprisingly different from the one who had striven to heal him through her borrowed aphorisms.

"To think," she began, "to think he should escape, after being over there—over there, John, in blood and dirt and death—and come home to be shot in the back by a tramp with a gun! Where is the man? You detained him, didn't you? Don't tell me you let him go."

"I know where to find him," Raven temporized. "He'd no idea of going."

She insisted.

"You think it was an accident? He couldn't have had a grudge. Dick hadn't an enemy."

"You can make your mind easy about that," said Raven, taking refuge in a detached sincerity. "It wasn't meant for Dick. He was as far from the fellow's thoughts as the moon."

He remembered the fringe of somber woods and the curve of the new moon.

"It isn't so much the misfortunes of life," Milly kept on. She was beating her knee now with one closed hand and her voice kept time. "It's the chances, the horrible way things come and knock you down because you're in their path. If he doesn't"—here she stopped and Raven knew she added, in her own mind, "if he doesn't live—I shall never believe in anything again. Never, John, never!"

Raven was silent, not only because it seemed well for her to free her mind, but because he had a sudden curios-

ity to hear more. This was Milly outside her armor at last. When she had caught him out of his armor, she had proposed sending him to the Psychopathic, and here she was herself, raving against heaven and earth as unrestrainedly as a savage woman might beat her head against a cliff.

"Chance!" she repeated. "That's what it is, chance! He got in the way and he was struck. I lived through the War. I gave my son. What more could I do? But now, to have him come home to our old house and be shot in the back! How can you sit there and not move a muscle or say a word? What are you thinking about?"

"Well," said Raven quietly, "if you'll believe me, I'm thinking about you. I'm mighty sorry for you, Milly. And I'm keeping one ear cocked for Nan."

"There's no change," she interrupted him. "Charlotte would tell us. I left Nan on purpose. I want him, every time he opens his eyes, to see her there. She's the one he wants. Mothers don't count." Here again the elemental woman flashed out and Raven welcomed the reality of it. "She couldn't help being kind, with him as he is."

No, he inwardly concurred, Nan, who had kissed the boy to hearten him in his need, would be ready with her medicinal love again. She'd pour herself out: trust her for that.

"Besides," he said, "besides you and Dick and Nan, I was thinking of Old Crow."

"Old Crow?" This threw her out for an instant and she went back to her conception of Raven as a victim of complexes of which Old Crow was chief. "It's no time for dwelling on things that are past and gone. You think far too much about Old Crow. It weakens you."

"Old Crow," said Raven quietly, "is the chap you and I need here to-night. I'd like mighty well to sit down

and talk it over with him. So would you, if you knew him better. Old Crow went through what you and I are going through now. He found the world a deuced puzzling place and he didn't see the conventional God as any sort of a solution. And then—I don't suppose you're going to bed right off. You won't feel like sleep?"

"Bed!" she flung out. "Sleep!"

"Then look here, Milly," said Raven, "you do what I tell you." He opened a drawer in his desk and took out the mottled book. "Here's Old Crow's journal. You sit here by the fire and read it while I take Nan's place and send her off to bed. And if it doesn't give you an idea Old Crow's got his mind on us to-night, wherever he is, I'm mistaken."

He brought her the book. She took it, with no interest, leaving it unopened on her knee.

"Wherever he is," she repeated, not precisely curious, but as if she might be on the verge of it when she again had time. "I didn't know you believed in immortality."

"I didn't, either," said Raven. "But," he added, "I believe in Old Crow."

She was holding the book mechanically and he left her sitting with it still unopened and went in to Dick. He found him restless, not in any movement of his body but in the glance of his dilated eyes. Nan looked up, grave, steady, gone back, as Raven saw, to her trained habit of action, emotionless, concentrated on the moment.

"You'd better go up to bed," said Raven. "I'll stay now. He can have you to-morrow."

"He can have me all the time," said Nan clearly, and Dick's eyes turned upon her with an indifferent sort of query. How much did she mean by that? It sounded as if she meant everything, and yet Raven, his heart constricting, knew it might not be more than impetuous

sacrifice, the antidote given in haste. But now Dick spoke and Raven bent to him, for either he was too weak to speak clearly or he was saving himself.

"Don't arrest him. No end of talk."

"No," said Raven. "It wasn't you he was out for."

The restless eyes turned on Nan.

"Go to bed," said Dick.

Her hand had been on his and she took it gently away, and got up.

"I'm not sleepy," she said. "I'll camp in the library a while."

When she had gone Raven, sitting there by Dick, who did not speak again, listened for the murmur of voices from the library. Would they keep companionable vigil, the two women, heartening each other by a word, or would they sit aloof, each wrapped in her own grief? There was not a sound. They were falling in with that determination of the house to maintain its sinister stillness, its air of knowing more than it would tell.

XXXIX

Tenney, not finding the key of the hut, and increasingly alive to the anguish flaring in his foot, went home by the back way. Tira was waiting at the door. She saw him coming, and, for that first moment, he could ignore the pain in a savage recognition of her plight. She had, he thought, having missed the key, not even tried the door. But this brief summary of her guilty folly angered him for the moment only. He was suddenly tired, and his foot did ache outrageously. He gave way to the pain of it, and limped heavily. As he neared the house, however, his face did relax into a mirthless smile. There were tracks under the kitchen window. She had hoped to get in that way and had found the window fastened. And all the time there was the door, ready for a confident hand. But the ill chance of it amused him for not much more than the instant of its occurrence. His mind recoiled upon his own miserable state. He had gone out in search of justice, and he had come home in terror of what he had himself unjustly done. If he had been imaginative enough to predict the righteous satisfaction he expected from his vengeance on Raven, he might have foreseen himself coming back to bring Tira the evil news, and smiling, out of his general rectitude, at her grief and terror. Perhaps he would have been wrong in those unformulated assumptions. Perhaps he would not have been calm enough for satisfaction in the completed deed, since the mind does, after a red act, become at once fugitive before the furies of inherited beliefs and fears. Perhaps it would

have shrunk cowering back from the old, old penalty against the letting of blood, as it did now when he was faced with the tragic irony of the deed as it was. He had shed blood and, by one of the savage mischances of life, the blood of a man innocent of offense against him. After the first glance at Tira, he did not look at her again, but passed her, threw open the door, and went in. His thoughts, becoming every instant more confused, as the appalling moments in the woods beat themselves out noisily, seemed to favor closing the door behind him. It was she who had brought him to this pass. It was she who had locked his door upon herself and, in her wantonness, as good as thrown away the key. Let her stay outside. But he was not equal to even that sharpness of decision and Tira, after she found the door swinging free, went in.

Tenney had seated himself in his arm-chair by the window. He had not taken off his hat, and he sat there, hands clasped upon the stick Raven had tossed him, his head bent over them. He looked like a man far gone in age and misery, and Tira, returning from the bedroom, the child in her arms, felt a mounting of compassion and was no longer afraid. She laid the child in its cradle and, with a cheerful clatter, put wood in the stove. The child cried fretfully and, still stepping about the room, she began to sing, as if to distract it, though she knew she was making the sounds of life about Tenney to draw him forth from the dark cavern where his spirit had taken refuge. But he did not look up, and presently she spoke to him:

"Ain't you goin' to unharness? I'm 'most afraid Charlie'll be cold."

The form of her speech was a deliberate challenge, a fashion of rousing him to an old contention. For it was one of her loving habits with animals to name them, and

Tenney, finding that "all foolishness," would never accept the pretty intimacies. To him, the two horses were the bay and the colt, and now Tira, with an anxious intent of stirring him even to contradiction, longed to hear him repeat, "Charlie?" adding, "D'you mean the bay?" But he neither spoke nor moved, and she suddenly realized that if she screamed at him he would not hear. She went on stepping about the room, and presently, when the dusk had fallen so that she could see the horse in the yard only as an indeterminate bulk, she slipped out, unharnessed him, and led him into his stall. She began to fodder the cattle, pausing now and then to listen for Tenney's step. But he did not come. She returned to the house for her pails, lighted a lantern, and went back to milk. Still he did not come, and when she carried in her milk, there he sat in the dark kitchen, his head bent upon his hands. Tira shut up the barn, came back to the kitchen, and put out her lantern; then she was suddenly spent, and sat down a moment by the stove, her hands in her lap. And so they sat together, the man and woman, and the child was as still as they. He had whimpered himself off to sleep.

Tira, recognizing herself, with a dull indifference, as too tired to move, was not at first conscious of thinking either about what she had gone through or what was before her. But as her muscles relaxed, her mind, as it was always doing now for its rest and comfort, left this present scene where, for the first active moments, Tenney had filled her thoughts, and settled upon Raven. He had told her to come to him. He had ordered it, as if she belonged to him, and there was heavenly sweetness in that. Tira loved this new aspect of him. She rested in it, as a power alive to her, protecting her, awake to her well-being. Yet, after that first glance at Tenney, sitting there with

head bent over the stick, she had not a moment's belief in her right to go. It was sweet to be commanded, to her own safety, but here before her were the dark necessities she must share. And suddenly, as she sat there, and the sense of Raven's protectingness enfolded her and she grew more rested, a feeling of calmness fell upon her, of something friendly nearer her than Raven even (though it had seemed to her lately as if nothing could be more near), and she almost spoke aloud, voicing her surprised delight: "Why, the Lord Jesus Christ!" But she did not speak the words aloud. She refrained in time, for fear of disturbing Tenney in some way not wise for him; but her lips formed them and they comforted her. Then, suddenly tranquillized and feeling strong, she rose and fed the child and made some bustling ado, talking about milk and bread, hoping to rouse Tenney to the thought of food. But he sat there darkly, and by and by she put the kettle on and, in the most ordinary manner, made tea and spread their table.

"Come," she said to him. "Supper's ready. We might's well draw up."

He did glance at her then, as if she had surprised him, and she smiled, to give him confidence. At that time Tira felt all her strength, her wholesome rude endurance, to the full, and stood tall and steady there in the room with the two who were her charge and who now, it seemed to her, needed her equally. Tenney rose with difficulty and stood a moment to get control of his foot. He walked to the table and was about to sit down. But suddenly his eyes seemed to be drawn by his hand resting on the back of the chair. He raised it, turned it palm up and scrutinized it, and then he looked at the other hand with the same questioning gaze, and, after a moment, when Tira, reading his mind, felt her heart beating wildly, he went to

the sink and pumped water into the basin. He began to wash his hands. There was nothing on them, no stain such as his fearful mind projected, but he washed them furiously and without looking.

"You stop a minute," said Tira quietly. "I'll give you a mite o' hot water, if you'll wait."

She filled a dipper from the tea kettle, and, tipping the water from his basin into the sink, mixed hot and cold, trying it solicitously, and left him to use it.

"There!" she said, standing by the table waiting for him, "you come as quick's you can. Your tea'll be cold."

So they drank their tea together, and Tira forced herself to eat, and, from the store of woman's experience within her, knew she ought to urge him also to hearten himself with meat and bread. But she did not dare. She could feel the misery of his sick mind. She had always felt it. But there were reactions, of obstinacy, of rage almost, in the obscurity of its workings, and these she could not challenge. But she poured him strong tea, and when he would take no more, got up and cleared the table. And he kept his place, staring down at his hand. He was studying it with a look curiously detached, precisely as he had regarded it at the moment when he seemed to become aware of its invisible stain. Tira, as she went back and forth about the room, found herself also, by force of his attitude, glancing at the hand. Almost she expected to find it red. When her work was done, she sat down by the stove and undressed the baby, who was fretful still and crying in a way she was thankful to hear. It made a small commotion in the room. If it irritated Tenney into waking from his daze, so much the better.

Ten o'clock came, and Tenney had not stirred. When eleven struck she roused from her doze and saw his head had sunken forward; he was at the nodding point of sleep.

She had been keeping up the fire, and presently she rose to put in wood, knocking down a stick she had left on the end of the stove to be reached for noiselessly. He started awake and rose, pushing back his chair.

"Is that them?" he asked her, with a disordered wildness of mien. "Have they come?"

By this she knew he expected arrest for what he had done.

"No," she said, in her quietest voice. "Nobody's comin' here to-night. I dropped a stick o' wood, that's all. Don't you think you better poke off to bed?"

He did not answer her, but went to the window, put his hands to his face and peered out. Then he turned, stood a moment looking about the room as if for some suggestion of refuge, went to the couch, and lay down. Tira stood for a moment considering. Almost at once, he was asleep. She threw a shawl over him and went into the bedroom and stretched herself as she was on the bed.

XL

Raven, to his sorry amusement, discovered something. It was Milly, and she had changed. Indubitably Milly regarded him with a mixture of wonder and of awe. He had taken command of the situation in the house and developed it rationally. The house itself had become a converging point for all medical science could do for a man hit in a vital spot and having little chance of recovery. But what Raven knew to be the common sense of the measures he brought to pass, Milly, in her wildness of anxiety, looked upon as the miracles of genius. She even conciliated him, as the poor human conciliates his god. She brought him the burnt offering of her expressed belief, her humility of admiration. And whenever one of the family was allowed to supplement the nurses, by day or night, she effaced herself in favor of Raven or Nan. Raven was the magician who knew where healing lay. Nan was warmth and coolness, air and light. Dick's eyes followed Nan and she answered them, comforting, sustaining him, Raven and Milly fully believed, in his hold on earth. But as to Milly, Raven had to keep on wondering over her as she wondered at him. So implicit had been his belief in her acquired equipment for applying accepted remedies to the mischances of life, that he was amazed at seeing her devastated, overthrown. She was even less calm than the women he remembered here in this country neighborhood. When sickness entered their homes, they were, for the most part, models of efficient calm. They had reserves of energy. He

wondered if Milly had crumbled so because she had not only to act but to decide how to seem to act. She had to keep up the wearisome routine of fitting her feelings to her behavior, her behavior to her feelings. There were not only things to be done; there were also the social standards of what ought, in crises, to be felt. She had to satisfy her gods. And she simply wasn't strong enough. Her hold was broken. She knew it, clutched at him and hung on him, a dead weight, while he buoyed her up. Were they all, he wondered, victims of the War? Milly, as she said that night when she came to him in her stark sincerity while Dick lay unconscious, had given him up once. She had given him to the War, and done the act with the high decorum suited to it. And the country had returned him to her. But now, grotesque, bizarre beyond words, she had to surrender him to a fool "shooting pa'tridges." For facing a travesty like that, she had no decorum left.

Dick, too, was the victim of abnormal conditions. He had been summoned to the great act of sacrifice to save the world, and the call had challenged him to after judgments he was not ripe enough to meet. It had beguiled him into a natural sophistry. For had not the world, in its need, called mightily on the sheer strength and endurance of youth to slay the dragon of brute strength in her enemies? Youth had done it. Therefore there was no dragon, whether of the mind or soul, it could not also slay. His fellows told him so, and because they were his fellows and spoke the tongue he understood, he believed it with a simple honesty that was Dick.

As to Nan, she seemed to Raven the one sane thing in a bewildered world; and for himself: "I'm blest if I believe I'm so dotty, after all," he mused. "What do you think about it?" And this last he addressed, not to himself, but

to the ever-present intelligence of Old Crow. He kept testing things by what Old Crow would think. He spoke of him often, as of a mind active in the universe, but only to Nan. And one night, late enough in the spring for the sound of running water and a bitterness of buds in the air, he said it to her when she came down the path to him where he stood listening to the stillness broken by the ticking of the season's clock—steady, familiar sounds, that told him winter had broken and the heart of things was beating on to leaf and bloom. He had, if he was not actually waiting for her, hoped she would come out, and now he saw her coming, saw her step back into the hall for a scarf and appear again, holding it about her shoulders. At last, firm as she was in spirit, she had changed. She was thinner, with more than the graceful meagerness of youth, and her eyes looked pathetically large from her pale face. She had seen Dick go slipping down the slope, and now that beneficent reactions were drawing him slowly back again, she was feeling the waste of her own bodily fortitude.

"Where shall we go?" she asked him. "Been to the hut lately?"

No, Raven told her, he hadn't been there for days. They crossed the road and began the ascent into the woods.

"So you don't know whether she's been there?" Nan asked. She stopped to breathe in the wood fragrances, coming now like a surprise. She had almost forgotten "outdoors."

"Yes," said Raven. "I know. Sometimes I fancy she won't need to go there again. Tenney's a wreck. He sits there in the kitchen and doesn't speak. He isn't thinking about her. He's thinking of himself."

"How do you know? You haven't been over?"

"Yes, I went over the morning after the shooting. I intended to tell Tira to get her things on and come down to the house. But when I saw him—saw them—I couldn't."

"You were sorry for him?" Nan prompted.

They had reached the hut, and Raven took out the key from under the stone. Close by, there was a velvet fern frond ready to unfurl. He unlocked the door and they went in. Her last question he did not answer until he had thrown up windows and brought out chairs to the veranda at the west. When they were seated, he went on probing for his past impression and speaking thoughtfully.

"No, I don't know that I was particularly sorry for him. But somehow the two of them there together, with that poor little devil between them—well, it seemed to me I couldn't separate them. That's marriage, I suppose. Anyhow it looked to me like it: something you couldn't undo because they wouldn't have it undone."

Nan turned on him her old impetuous look.

"You simpleton!" she had it on her tongue to say. "She doesn't want it undone because anybody that lifts a finger will get you—not her—deeper into the mire." But she did say: "I don't believe you can even guess what she wants, chiefly because she doesn't want anything for herself. But if you didn't ask her to leave him, what did you do?"

"I told him to hold himself ready for arrest."

"You're a funny child," commented Nan. "You warn the criminal and give him a chance to skip."

"Yes," said Raven unsmilingly. "I hoped he would. I thought I was giving her one more chance. If he did skip, so much the better for her."

"How did she look?" asked Nan, and then added, tormenting herself, "Beautiful?"

"Yes, beautiful. Not like an angel, as we've seen her. Like a saint: haggard, with hungry eyes. I suppose the saints hunger, don't you? And thirst." He was looking off through the tree boles and Nan, also looking, found the distance dim and felt the sorrow of youth and spring. "Everything," said Raven, "seems to be in waves. It has its climax and goes down. Tenney's reached the climax of his jealousy. Now he's got himself to think about, and the other thing will go down. Rather a big price for Dick to pay, to make Tira safe, but he has paid and I fancy she's safe." He turned to her suddenly. "Milly's very nice to you," he asserted, half interrogatively.

He saw the corner of her mouth deepen a little as she smiled. Milly had not, they knew, been always nice.

"Yes," she agreed, "very nice. She gives me all the credit she doesn't give you about doctors and nurses and radiographs and Dick's hanging on by his eyelids. She says I've saved him."

"So you have," said Raven. "You've kept his heart up. And now you're tired, my dear, and I want you to go away."

"To go away?" said Nan. "Where?"

"Anywhere, away from us. We drain you like the deuce."

"No," said Nan, turning from him and speaking half absently, "I can't go away."

"Why can't you?"

"He'd miss me."

"He'd know why you went."

Her old habit of audacious truth-telling constrained her.

"I should have to write to him," she said. "And I couldn't. I couldn't keep it up. I can baby him all kinds of ways when he's looking at me with those big eyes. But

I couldn't write him as he'd want me to. I couldn't, Rookie. It would be a promise.

"Milly thinks you have promised." This he ventured, though against his judgment.

"No," said Nan. "No, I haven't promised. Do you want me to?"

"I don't know," Raven answered, without a pause, as if he had been thinking about it interminably. "If it had some red blood in it, if you were—well, if you loved him, Nan, I should be mighty glad. I'd like to see you living, up to the top notch, having something you knew was the only thing on earth you wanted. But these half and half things, these falterings and doing things because somebody wants us to! God above us! I've faltered too much myself. I'd rather have made all the mistakes a man can compass, done it without second thought, than have ridden up to the wall and refused to take it."

"Do you think of her all the time?" she ventured, in her turn, and perversely wondered if he would think she meant Tira and not Aunt Anne.

But he knew. "No," he said, "I give you my word she's farther away from me than she ever was in her life. For a while she was here, at my elbow, asking me what I was going to do about her Palace of Peace. But suddenly—I don't know whether it's because my mind has been on Dick—suddenly I realized she was gone. It's the first time." Here he stopped, and Nan knew he meant it was the first time since his boyhood that he had felt definitely free from that delicate tyranny. And being jealous for him and his dominance over his life, she wondered if another woman had crowded out the memory of Aunt Anne. Had Tira done it?

"And you haven't decided about the money."

"I've decided," he surprised her by saying at once, "to talk it out with Anne."

She could only look at him.

"One night," he continued, "when Dick was at his worst, I was there alone with him, an hour or so, and I was pretty well keyed up. I seemed to see things in a stark, clear way. Nothing mattered: not even Dick, though I knew I never loved the boy so much as I did at that minute. I seemed to see how we're all mixed up together. And the things we do to help the game along, the futility of them. And suddenly I thought I wouldn't stand for any futility I could help, and I believe I asked Old Crow if I wasn't right. 'Would you?' I said. I knew I spoke out loud, for Dick stirred. I felt a letter in my pocket—it was about the estate, those bonds, you remember—and I knew I'd got to make up my mind about Anne's Palace of Peace."

Nan's heart was beating hard. Was he going to follow Aunt Anne's command, the poor, pitiful letter that seemed so generous to mankind and was yet so futile in its emotional tyranny?

"And I made up my mind," he said, with the same simplicity of hanging to the fact and finding no necessity for explaining it, "to get hold of Anne, put it to her, let her see I meant to be square about it, but it had got to be as I saw it and not as she did. Really because I'm here and she isn't."

Her eyes filled with tears, and as she made no effort to restrain them, they ran over and spilled in her lap. She had thought hard for him, but never so simply, so sternly as this.

"How do you mean, Rookie," she asked humbly, in some doubt as to her understanding. "How can you get hold of Aunt Anne?"

"I don't know," said he. "But I've got to. I may not be able to get at her, but she must be able to get at me. She's got to. She's got to listen and understand I'm doing my best for her and what she wants. Old Crow understands me. And when Anne does—why, then I shall feel free."

And while he implied it was freedom from the tyranny of the bequest, she knew it implied, too, a continued freedom from Aunt Anne. Would he ever have set his face so fixedly toward that if he had not found Tira? And what was Tira's silent call to him? Was it of the blood only, because she was one of those women nature has manacled with the heaviness of the earth's demands? Strangely, she knew, nature acts, sometimes sending a woman child into the world with the seeds of life shut in her baby hand, a wafer for men to taste, a perfume to draw them across mountain and plain. The woman may be dutiful and sound, and then she suffers bewildered anguish from its potency; or she may league herself with the powers of darkness, and then she is a harlot of Babylon or old Rome. And Tira was good. Whether or not Raven heard the call of her womanhood—here Nan drew back as from mysteries not hers to touch—he did feel to the full the extremity of her peril, the pathos of her helplessness, the spell of her beauty. She was as strong as the earth because it was the maternal that spoke in her, and all the forces of nature must guard the maternal, that its purpose may be fulfilled. Tira could not speak the English language with purity, but this was immaterial. She was Tira, and as Tira she had innocently laid on Raven the old, dark magic. Nan was under no illusion as to his present abandonment of Tira's cause. That he seemed to have accepted the ebbing of her peril, that he should speak of it with something approaching indifference, did not

mean that he had relaxed his vigilance over her. He was not thinking of her with any disordered warmth of sympathy. But he was thinking. Suddenly she spoke, not knowing what she was going to say, but out of the unconscious part of her:

"Rookie, you don't want anything really, do you, except to stand by and give us all a boost when we're down?"

Raven considered a moment.

"I don't know," he said, "precisely what I do want. If you told me Old Crow didn't want anything but giving folks a boost, I'm with you there. He actually didn't. You can tell from his book."

"I can't seem to bear it," said Nan. She was looking at the darkening woods and her wet eyes blurred them more than the falling dusk. "It isn't healthy. It isn't right. I want you to want things like fury, and I don't know whether I should care so very much if you banged yourself up pretty well not getting them. And if you actually got them! O Rookie! I'd be so glad."

"You're a dear child," said Raven, "a darling child."

"That's it," said Nan. "If you didn't think I was a child, perhaps you'd want me. O Rookie! I wish you wanted me!"

Into Raven's mind flashed the picture of Anne on her knees beside him saying, in that sharp gasp of her sorrow, "You don't love me." This was no such thing, yet, in some phase, was life going to repeat itself over and over in the endless earth journeys he might have to make, futilities of mismated minds, the outcry of defrauded souls? But at least this wasn't his cowardly silence on the heel of Anne's gasping cry. He could be honest here, for this was Nan.

"My darling," he said, "you're nearer to me than any-

thing in this world—or out of it. Don't you make any mistake about that. And if I don't want things 'like fury,' as you say, it's a matter of the calendar, that's all. Dick wants them like fury. So do you. I'm an old chap, dear. You can't set back the clock."

But he had pushed her away, as his aloofness had pushed Anne. He had thrown Anne back upon her humiliated self. He had tossed Nan forward into Dick's generation and hers. But here was the difference. She wasn't going to cry out, "You don't love me." Instead, she turned to him, shivering a little and drawing her scarf about her shoulders.

"We'd better go down," she said. "It's getting cold. Dick'll be wondering."

They got up and Raven set the chairs inside the hut and took his glance about to see if all was in order: for he did not abandon the unwilling hope that Tira might sometime come. As they went down the hill the talk turned to the hylas and the spring, but when they reached the house Nan did not go in to Dick. She went to her own room and lay down on her bed and thought passionately of leaving Rookie free. How was it possible? Could he be free while she was bound? Sometimes of late she had been so tired that she could conceive of no refuge but wild and reckless outcry. And what could he think she meant when she said: "I wished you wanted me"?

XLI

Spring came on fast and Nan, partly to assure Milly she wasn't to be under foot forever, talked of opening her house and beginning to live there, for the first time without Aunt Anne. But she predicted it, even to Milly, with no great interest, and Raven, though he had urged her to run away from the cloudy weather Milly and Dick made for her, protested against her living alone. Dick was now strong enough to walk from his room to the porch, and Raven, watching him, saw in him a greater change than the languor of low vitality. He had the bright-eyed pallor of the man knocked down into the abyss and now crawling up a few paces (only a few, tremulous, hesitating) to get his foothold on the ground again. He was largely silent, not, it sometimes seemed, from weakness, but the torpor of a tired mind. He was responsive to their care for him, ready with the fitting word and look and yet, underneath the good manners of it all, patently acquiescent.

Then Nan found herself rested, suddenly, in the way of youth. One morning she got up quite herself again, and wrote her housekeeper to assemble servants and bring them up, and told Raven he couldn't block her any longer. She had done it for herself, and she quoted the overworked commonplace of the psychological moment. He, also believing in the moment, refrained from argument and went over to open doors and windows. He was curiously glad of a word with her house, not so much to

keep up old acquaintance as to ask its unresponsiveness whether it was going to mean Nan alone for him henceforth or whether, at a time like this when he stood interrogating it, Anne Hamilton also stood there, in her turn interrogating him. Was she there to-day? Everything spoke mutely of her, the wall-paper she had prized for its ancient quaintness, the furniture in the lines of grace she loved. At that desk she had sat, slender figure of the gentlewoman of a time older than her own. Was her presence so etched in impalpable tracery on the air that he ought to feel it? Was she aching with defeated hopes because she might almost be expecting him, not only to remember but even to hear and see? No death could be more complete than the death of her presence here. He could not, even by the most remorseful determination, conjure up the living thought of her. Somehow it had seemed that here at least he might explain himself to her, feel that he had made himself clear. He did actually speak to her:

"I can't do it, Anne. Don't you see I can't?"

This was what he had meant when he told Nan he must get hold of her. What place could be so fortunate as this, full of the broken threads of her personality? They only needed knitting up by his passionate challenge, to be Anne. He called upon her, he caught the fluttering fringes of her presence in his trembling hands. But he could not knit them up. They broke, they floated away. It seemed, from the dead unresponsiveness of her house, as if there had never been any Anne. So he gave it up, and, in extreme dullness of mind, went about opening windows, and as the breeze idled in and stirred the waiting air and the sunlight rushed to it, he seemed to be sweeping the last earthly vestiges of her from the place that had known her best. And at once it appeared to him that he had

done an inexorable, perhaps even a cruel thing, and he hurried out, leaving the air and sun to be more merciful than he.

When he went into his own yard he saw Dick sitting under the western pines, where Raven had set a couple of chairs and had a hammock swung. Dick had ignored the hammock. He scarcely sat at ease, and Raven had an idea he was meeting discomfort halfway, with the idea of making himself fit. He did say a word of thanks for the chairs.

"Only," he added, "don't let it look too sociable. That'll be as bad as the porch." He laughed a little, and concluded: "I don't mean you, Jack. You know that, don't you?"

Raven guessed he was allowing himself the indulgence of avoiding his mother. For now Milly, as he recovered, had struggled hard for her lost poise and regained it, in a slightly altered form, it is true; but still she had it pretty well in hand, she was unweariedly attentive to him and inexorably self-sacrificing in leaving Nan the right of way. Her life had again become a severely ritualistic social enterprise, but now she was just far enough lacking in spontaneity to fail in playing her game as prettily as she used. It was tiring to watch, chiefly because you could see how it tired her to play.

Raven went down the little foot-path to Dick, and he thought anew how illness had ravaged him. He had the tired eyes, the hollow cheek of ineffective youth.

"Hoping you'd come," said Dick. "Now, where's Tenney?"

"Tenney," said Raven, "is at home, so far as I know. I saw him last night."

"Go up there?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

Raven smiled a little, as if he found himself foolish or at best incomprehensible.

"Well," he said, "I gave him every chance to skip. I hoped he would. That would be the simplest way out. But when I found he wasn't going to, I began to go there every night to let him see I was keeping an eye on him. I don't go in. I just call him out and we stare over each other's heads and I inform him you're better or not so well (the probation dodge, you know) and he never hears me, apparently, and then I go away. I've got used to doing it. Maybe he's got used to having it done. Maybe it's a relief to him. I don't know."

"Does he still look like a lunatic at large?"

"More or less. His eyes are less like infuriated shoe buttons, but on the whole he seems to have quieted a lot."

"You don't suppose," said Dick, "you've put the fear of God into him?"

"Not much. If anybody has, it was you when he saw you topple over and knew he'd got the wrong man."

"He was laying for you, then," said Dick.

"Why, yes," said Raven. "Tira was there, telling me he'd set up a gun, and she'd got to the point of letting Nan take her away, when he fired. What the dickens were you up there for, anyhow?" he ended, not quite able to deny himself reassurance.

"I'd heard he was out with a gun," said Dick briefly. "Charlotte told me. And I gathered from your leaving word for Nan that the Tenney woman was there—at the hut, you know."

"Don't say 'the Tenney woman,'" Raven suggested. "I can't say I feel much like calling her by his name myself, but 'the Tenney woman' isn't quite——"

"No," said Dick temperately. "All right, old man, I won't."

"Awfully sorry you got it instead of me," said Raven, apparently without feeling. He had wanted to say this for a long time. "Wish it had been the other way round."

"I don't, then," said Dick, gruffly in his turn. "It's been an eye-opener, the whole business."

"What has?"

"This." He evidently meant his own hurt and the general viewpoint induced by it. "I'm not going to stay round here, you know," he continued, presenting this as a proposition he had got to state abruptly or not at all.

"Why not?"

"I don't believe I could say," Dick temporized, in a way that suggested he didn't mean to try. "There's Mum, you know. She's going to be at me again to go in for my degree. Oh, yes, she will, soon as she thinks I won't come unglued. Well, I don't want it. I simply don't. And I don't want what she calls a profession: any old thing, you know, so long as it's a profession. I couldn't go in for that either, Jack. If I do anything, it's got to be on my own, absolutely on my own. Fact is, I'd like to go back to France."

"Reconstruction?" Raven suggested, after a minute.

"Maybe. Not that I'm specially valuable. Only it would be something to get my teeth into."

Was this, too, Raven wondered, an aftermath of the War? Had it shaken the atoms of his young purpose too far astray for them ever to cohere again? Dick had had one purpose. Even that didn't seem to be surviving, in any operative form.

"Writing?" he suggested. "Oxford—and poetry?"

Dick shook his head.

"Well," said Raven, "if it's France then, maybe I'll go with you."

Dick smiled slightly. Did his lip tremble?

"No," he said, at once, as if he'd been waiting for it, "you stay here and look after Nan."

This gave Raven the slightest opening.

"That's the devil of it," he said, "your leaving Nan."

"Yes," said Dick quietly, his eyes on an orchard tree where an unseen robin sang, "I'm leaving her."

"She's been devoted to you," Raven ventured.

"Quite so. I've been lying there and seeing——"

He paused and Raven prompted:

"Seeing what?"

Dick finished, with a deeper quiet:

"Seeing her look at you."

Raven, too, stared at the tree where the robin kept up the bright beauty of his lay. He was conscious, not of any need to combat this finality of Dick's, but of a sense, more poignant than he could support without calling on his practiced endurance, of the pity of it, the "tears of things." Here was youth, its first bitter draught in hand, not recoiling from it, but taking it with the calmness of the older man who has fewer years to taste it in. He could not ask the boy to consider, to make no hasty judgment. Whatever lay behind the words, it was something of a grave consequence. And Dick himself led the way out of the slough where they were both caught.

"Curious things come to you," he said, "when you're laid by the heels and can't do anything but think: I mean, as soon as you get the nerve to think."

"Such as?"

"Well, poetry, for one thing. When I began to think —and I didn't want it to be about Nan any more than I could help—I used to have a temperature, you know—

puzzled them, doctor, nurse, all of you. Nan, that was! I knew it, though the rest of you hadn't the sense. Well, I made my mind run away from it. I said I'd think about poetry, my long poem. I'd lie there and say it over to myself, and see if the rest of it wouldn't come." He laughed a little, though not bitterly. He was frankly amused. "What do you think? I couldn't even remember the confounded thing. But I could other things: the verse I'd despised. Wasn't that the limit? Omar Khayyám! I lay there and remembered it by the yard."

"That's easy," said Raven. "Nothing like first impressions. They stick."

"Evidently," said Dick. "They did stick. And my stuff didn't."

"Is this," Raven ventured, not seeing whether the boy was quivering under his calm, "a case against the moderns?"

Dick answered promptly, though Raven could only wonder, after all, just what he meant:

"It's a case against me." He went on, his eyes still on the melodious orchard coverts. It must have been a vagabond robin swaggering there, really deriding nests, he found so much leisure to sing about them. "I wanted to say I didn't get you that time when you told me you'd pretty much done with the world. I thought Mum was right: *cafard*, you remember. But I've swung round into the same rut. It's a rotten system. I'm done with it."

Raven looked at him in a sudden sharp misery of apprehension. First Old Crow, then he, then Dick, one generation following another.

"Don't you go that path, old man," he said. "You'll only lose your way and have to come back."

"Come back?"

"Yes. Old Crow did. Remember the book. He chal-

lenged the whole business, and then he swung round to adoring it all, the world and Whoever made it. He didn't understand it a whit better, but he believed, he accepted, he adored."

"What would you say?" Dick asked curiously, after a moment. "Just what happened to him?"

"Why, I suppose," said Raven, "in the common phrase, he found God."

They were silent for a time and both of them tried desperately to think of the vagabond robin. Raven, his mind released by this fascination of dwelling on Dick apart from any responsibility of talking to him, found it running here, there, back and forth, over these weeks of their stay together. It halted, it ran on, it stopped again to consider, but always it was of Dick and incidentally of himself who didn't matter so much, but who had to be in it all. Were they at one in this epidemic of world sickness? As the great explosive forces of destruction and decay seemed to have released actual germs to attack the physical well-being of races, had the terrible crashes of spiritual destinies unsettled the very air of life, poisoned it, drugged it with madness and despair? Was there a universal disease of the mind, following this wholesale slaughter, which the human animal hadn't been able really to bear though it had come to a lull in it, so that now it was, in sheer shrieking panic, clutching at its various antidotes to keep on living? One antidote was forgetfulness. They were forgetting the War, some thousands of decent folk who clearly had meant to remember. A horrible antidote that, but perhaps they had to take it to save themselves. Too big a price to pay for living (and such thread-paper lives!) but still there did seem to be a prejudice in favor of the mere drawing of breath. Maybe you couldn't blame them, spinning in the sunshine like insects of a day.

Some of the others had to save themselves by the wildness of a new intoxication. They danced, their spirits danced: a carmagnole it was, a dance of death, the death of the spirit as he saw it. But maybe, with this preposterous love of life in them they, too, had to do it. Maybe you couldn't blame them. He and Dick—they had been like two children, scared out of their wits, crying out, hitting at each other in the dark. Youth and age, that was what they had fought about. It had been an unseemly scrap, a "you're another." Dick had been brought up against life as it looks when you see it naked, the world—and what a world! No wonder he swore it was a world such as neither he nor his fellows, like him aghast, would have made. He would simply have to live some quarter century to find out what sort of a world he and his fellows did actually make.

And Raven: Lord! Lord! what was the use of having traveled his own quarter century along the everlasting road if it didn't make him at least silent in sheer pity of it: youth singing along to the Dark Tower, jingling spurs and caracoling nag, something it didn't quite know the feeling of shut in its nervous hand? What was it shut there? The key, that was it: the key to the Dark Tower. Youth made no doubt it was the key, easy to hold, quick to turn, and the gate would fly open and, if youth judged best, even the walls would fall. And yet, and yet, hasn't all youth held the key for that borrowed interval and do the walls ever really fall? But if age doesn't know enough to include youth in its understanding, as youth (except the poets) couldn't possibly include age, why then!

"I am," thought Raven, returning to the Charlottian vernacular, "very small potatoes and few in a hill."

And what was the Dick, the permanent Dick who would remain after a few more years had stripped him of the

merely imitative coloring he caught from his fellows? Dick talked about "herd madness," and here was he, at one with his own herd. He piped in verse because a few could sing, he—but what was the use hammering along on the old dissonance: youth, age, age, youth. And yet they needn't be dissonant. They weren't always. There was Nan! But as to Dick, he was simply Dick, a good substratum of his father, Anthony Powell, in him, a man who had had long views on trade and commerce and could manage men. And a streak of Raven, not too much but enough to imagine the great things the Powell streak would show him how to put his hand to.

Dick had been staring at him, finding him a long way off, and now he spoke, shyly if still curiously:

"Would you say you'd found God?"

Raven came back; he considered.

"No," he said, at last, "I couldn't say anything of the sort: it sounds like such awful swank. But I rather stand in with Old Crow. The fact is, Dick"—it was almost impossible to get this clarified in his own mind to the point of passing it on—"Old Crow's made me feel somehow—warm. As if there's a continuity, you know. As if they keep a hand on us, the generations that have passed. If that's so, we needn't be so infernally lonesome, now need we?"

"Well," said Dick, "we are pretty much alone."

"But we needn't be," said Raven, painfully sticking to his text, "because there are the generations. The being loyal to what the generations tried to build up, what they demand of us. And behind the whole caboodle of 'em, there's something else, something bigger, something warmer still. Really, you know, if only as a matter of convenience, we might call it—God."

A silence came here and he rather forgot Dick in fan-

tastically thinking how you might have to climb to the shoulders of a man (Old Crow's, for instance) to make your leap to God. You couldn't do it from the ground. Dick had taken off his glasses to wipe them and Raven, recalling himself and glancing up, found his eyes suffused and soft.

"Jackie," said Dick, "you're a great old sport."

XLII

The spring had two voices for Tira, the voice of a fainting hope and the voice of fear. The days grew so capriciously lovely that her heart tried a few notes in answer, and she would stand at her door and look off over the mountain, fancying herself back there on the other side with the spirit of girlhood in her, drawing her, in spite of dreary circumstances, to run, to throw herself on the ground by cool violet banks to dream and wake, all flushed and trembling, and know she must not tell that dream. But when the dusk came down and the hylas peeped and the moist air touched her cheek, she would lose courage and her heart beat miserably in tune with the melancholy of spring. Still, on the whole, she was coming alive, and no one knew better than she that life, to be life, must be also a matter of pain. Tenney was leaving her to a great extent free. He was off now, doing his fencing, and he would even, returning at noon or night, forget to fall into the exaggerated limp he kept in reserve to remind her of his grievance. She had not seen Raven for a long time now, except as he and Nan went by, always looking at the house, once or twice halting a moment in the road, as if debating whether they should call. And Tira, when she saw them, from her hiding behind the curtain, would step to the door and fasten it against them. She would not answer, she told herself, if they knocked. But they never did knock. They went on and left her to her chosen loneliness. For an instant she

would be unreasonably hurt, and then smile at herself, knowing it was she who had denied them.

It was an April morning when the spring so got into her blood that she began to wish for things. They were simple things she wished for: chiefly to feel herself active in the air and sun. She wanted to go away, to tire herself out with motion, and she made up her mind that, if Tenney went to the long pasture fencing, she would shut the house and run off with the baby into the woods. The baby was heavy now, but to-day, in her fullness of strength, his weight was nothing to her. They might even go over to Mountain Brook by the path "'cross lots" where the high stepping stones led to the track round the mountain. She loved the look of the stepping stones in spring when the river swirled about them and they dared you to cross and then jeered at you because the water foamed and threatened. She sang a little, finishing her morning tasks, and Tenney, coming from the barn with his axe, to start on his day's fencing, heard her sing. Tira, when she saw him, was in such haste to be off herself that she called to him from the window:

"Here! don't you forget your luncheon. I've got it 'most put up."

He glanced back over his shoulder, and spoke curtly:

"I don't want it. I'm goin' over on the knoll."

Her heart fell. The day was done. She would have to stay and get his dinner. Even an hour's vagabondage would be impossible, for the knoll was across the road overlooking the house and he would see her go. All these weeks she had held herself to a strict routine, so that every minute could be accounted for. This day only she had meant to break her habit and run. It was over then. She was bitterly disappointed, as if this, she thought, smiling a little to herself, was the only day there was.

She might as well wash blankets. She went to the bedroom to slip off her dress and put on a thick short-sleeved apron: for Tira was not of those delicate-handed housewives who can wash without splashing. She dripped, in the process, as if, Tenney used to tell her in the first days of their marriage, she got in all over. In her bedroom, with the sweet air on her bare arms and the robins calling and the general tumult and busy ecstasy outside, she stopped to wonder. Could she take the baby and slip out by the side door, and come back in time to fry Tenney's ham for dinner? No, it wouldn't do. He would be in for a drink, or the cow shut up in the barn with her calf would "loo" and he would wonder if anything was happening to them. A dozen things might come up to call him back. She would wash blankets. Then she saw the baby, through the doorway, sitting where she had put him, on the kitchen rug, and a quick anger for him possessed her.

"In that hot kitchen," she said aloud, "when there's all out-doors!"

She dragged one of the blankets from the bed, ran out as she was, bare-armed, bare-necked, and spread it on the grass in front of the house.

"It's goin' to be washed anyways," she placated the housewifely instinct within her, and she ran in for the baby and set him on the blanket. One heart-breaking thing about this baby who was "not right" was that there were no answers in him. She had tried all the wiles of motherhood to show him how she loved him, and coax him to respond, not so much in actual sentience to her as a baby's rejoinder to the world he could see and touch. He had no answers. But this morning when the sun fell warmly on him and the breeze stirred his coppery hair, he did, it seemed, hear for an instant the voice of earth.

He put out his fat hands and gurgled into a laugh. Tira went mad. She was immediately possessed by an overwhelming desire to hear him laugh again. She called to him, in little cooing shouts, she stretched out her arms to him, and then, when he would not be persuaded even to turn his head to her, she began to dance. Perhaps after the first step she really forgot about him. Perhaps the mother ecstasy ran into the ecstasy of spring. Perhaps, since she could not answer the lure of the woods by running to them that morning, the woods ran to her, the green magic of them, and threw their spell on her. She hardly saw what was about her, even the child. The cherry tree in bloom was a great whiteness at her right, the sun was a splendor, the breeze stirred her hair, and the child's head was a coppery ball she fixed her eyes upon. And while she waved her arms and danced, Martin, who had seen her from the road, and left his horse there, was coming toward her across the grass. Why could she not have seen him stop? Why was he nothing more than a tree trunk in the woods, standing there while she flung up her white arms and danced? The earth spirits may know. Pan might know. They had got Tira that day, released from her winter's chill. She did not, and still less Martin, his own blood rising with every pulse.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "That's the talk."

He made a stride and Tira darted back. But it was not she he ran toward. It was the child. He bent to the baby, caught him up and tossed him knowingly and the baby, again incredibly, laughed. Tira, taken aback at the sight of Martin, like a sudden cloud on her day, was arrested, in her first rush toward him, by the pretty laugh. Her baby in Martin's hands: that was calamity unspeakable. But the child had laughed. She would hardly have

known what price she would refuse even to the most desperate of evil spirits that could conjure up that laugh. She stood there breathless waiting on the moment, afraid of the event yet not daring to interrupt it, and Martin tossed the baby and the baby laughed again, as if it were "right." For Martin himself, except as the instrument of the miracle, she had hardly a thought. It might have been a hand out of heaven that had caught up the child, a hand from hell. But the child laughed. Martin, for the interval, was neither malevolent nor calculating. This was not one of his impish pleasantries. It might have been in the beginning, but he was enormously flattered at having touched the spring of that gurgling delight. For this was, he knew, a solemn baby. He had glanced at it, when he came Tira's way, but only carelessly and with no idea it was not like all babies. He supposed they began to take notice sometime, when they got good and ready. Queer little devils! But he was as vain and eager in his enjoyment of the response to his own charm as he was prodigal in using it. The spring day had got into his blood, too, and when he saw Tira dancing, the baby a part of the bright picture, he had taken the little devil up, with no purpose but somehow because it seemed natural, and when the child laughed he knew he had made a hit and kept on, singing now, not a cradle song but a man's song, something he had not himself thought of since he heard his old grandmother drone it between smokes, while she sat by the fire and dreamed of times past. It was something about Malbrook—"gone to the army"—"hope he never'll come back." And there was Tira now, within the circle of his fascination, bending a little toward him, her eyes darker than he had seen them for many a day, her white arms wide, as if she invited him. He wondered how a woman with her black hair could

have a skin so white; but he never guessed the lovely arms were stretched toward the child and not to him, and that they would have snatched the baby but for that amazing laugh. He stopped, breathless more from his thoughts than his gay exertion, and gave a shout.

"Here!" he cried, to Tira, in a joviality of finding her at one with him and the day (this first prime day of spring, a day that ought to make a person shake a leg), "you take him. Fine little chap! Set him on the ground ag'in an' you an' me'll have a tell."

Tira took the step toward him and lifted her arms for the child. She was glad the wild game had ended. Martin put the baby into her arms, but instantly she felt his hands on her elbows, holding her.

"Guess that's the way to git you, ain't it?" he inquired, in jovial good humor. "You can't scratch with the youngster between us. You can't cut an' run. By thunder, Tira! you're as handsome as you were that day I see you first an' followed you home? Remember? You're like"—his quick mind saw it at a leap—"you're like this cherry tree, all a-bloom."

He bent his head to her arm, almost as white as the cherry bloom and kissed it. A shadow dropped upon them. It was only a little sailing cloud but it startled Tira more than the kiss; the look of the day had changed so suddenly and as if it were changing for them alone. For there outside was the bright affluence of spring just as it had been but over them the warning cloud. She glanced about, in the one instant of darkening, and on the knoll across the road saw what the kind little cloud might have been sent to tell her. Tenney stood there, a stark figure, watching them. Her numbness to the presence of Martin who stood holding her broke in a throb of fear. The instant before, his lips on her arm had been

no more than the touch of a leaf that might have blown there. She did not even remember it. She lifted her face to his and, seeing the fear in it, he involuntarily released her and she stepped away from him.

"You go," she said. "Go quick. He's over there on the knoll. My God! don't look. Don't you know no better'n to look? He's fencin'. He's got his axe."

But Martin had looked. He gave a little disconcerted laugh and turned away.

"So long!" he called back over his shoulder. "Glad the little chap took to me. Have him out here an' whenever I'm goin' by——"

She did not hear. She had run, as if from nearing danger, into the house and closed the door behind her. It was warmer even in the few minutes since she had come out, but she had lost her delight in the open. She was afraid, and as Martin stepped into his wagon, he wondered why. Tira was a good, strong, husky girl, a streak of the gypsy in her. Sometimes in the old days he'd been half afraid of her himself when things didn't suit, mostly after he got carrying on with some other girl. The way her eyes opened on a chap! Why didn't she open 'em that way on Tenney? Queer proposition, a woman was, anyways.

Tira carried the baby into the front room and sat down by the window, still holding him. She pushed her chair back until the curtain hid her and, through the narrow strip between curtain and casing, kept her eyes on Tenney. For several minutes after Martin had driven away, he stood there, still as a tree. Then the tree came alive. Tenney moved back to the left, where the fence ran between field and pasture, and she lost him. But she could not hear his axe. In her anxiety she strained the child against her until he struggled and gave a fitful cry.

She did not heed the cry. This, her instinct told her, was the only safe place for him on earth: his mother's arms.

All through the morning she sat there, looking now and then from the window, and still holding the child. When the clock struck eleven, the sound awoke her. If she was to get dinner, she must be about it. Was she to get dinner? Or was she to assume that this day marked the settlement of the long account? The house itself, still in its morning disorder, told her the moment had come. The house itself, it seemed to whisper, could not possibly go on listening to the things it had listened to through the winter or holding itself against the horror of the more horrible silence. Who would think of eating on the verge of this last inevitable settlement? And what would the settlement be? What was there—she thought over the enemies she had feared. The crutch: that was gone. She had made sure of that. The gun: but if it were here she doubted whether Tenney would dare even look at it again, remembering that night when he washed at the invisible stain on his hands. A quarter of an hour had gone in these imaginings, and then she did get up, went into the kitchen, built her fire, and set the table. But as she moved about the room, she carried the baby with her, working awkwardly against his weight and putting him down for a minute only at a time and snatching him up again at an unexpected sound. Once a robin called just outside the window, a bold bright note; it might have been the vagabond robin from Raven's orchard who sang about nests but seemed never to break off singing long enough to find a straw for one. She caught up the child from the couch and stood breathless, listening. It seemed as if the robin knew, and somehow, like Martin, felt like laughing at her.

Tenney was there, at a few minutes after twelve, but dinner was not on time. He came in, washed his hands at the sink and glanced about him. The table was set, and Tira, at the stove, the child on her hip, was trying the potatoes. She did not look at him. If he looked strange, it seemed to her she might not be able to go on.

"I ain't dished up," she said. "I'm kinder late."

Tenney spoke immediately and his voice sounded merely quiet, not, she reasoned anxiously, as if he tried to make it so, but just—quiet.

"You ain't washed the breakfast dishes neither. Ain't you feelin' well?"

"Yes," said Tira, "well as common. I left 'em, that's all."

"Oh," said Tenney. "Wanted to git at suthin' else."

She turned and looked at him. Yes, he was different, not paler, nor, as she had seen him, aflame in a livid way, but different.

"Isr'el," she said, "I never knew 'Gene Martin was goin' to stop here. I knew no more'n the dead."

"Was that him?" asked Tenney indifferently. "I see somebody stopped. I thought mebbe 'twas the butcher. Then I remembered he comes of a Wednesday."

That settled it in her mind. The weekly call of the butcher was as fixed as church on Sunday. Tenney was playing for something, and she understood. The moment had come. The house and she both knew it. She was not sorry, and perhaps, though she had been good to it and kept it in faithful order, the house was not sorry either. Perhaps it would rather rest and fall into disorder the way Tenney would let it, if he were here alone. That was it. He had had enough of threats that made him sick with the reaction of nervous violence. He had had enough of real violence that recoiled on himself and made

him cower under the shadow of the law. He was going to turn her out of the house, the baby with her. And he did not seem to be suffering much over it, now he had made up his mind. Perhaps, now that the scene of the morning—three together in May sunshine—had confirmed his ugly doubts, he was relieved to wash his hands of them both. The phrase came into her mind, and that in itself startled her more than any fear of him. Wash his hands! How pitiful he had been that night he washed his hands!

They sat down to dinner together, and though Tira could not eat, she made pretense of being too busy, getting up from the table for this and that, and brewing herself a cup of tea. Tenney had coffee left over from breakfast, and when her tea was done she drank it hastily, standing at the sink where she could spill a part of it unnoticed. And when dinner was over he went peaceably away to the knoll again, and she hastily set the house in order while the baby slept.

When Tenney came home he was quite the same, silent but unmoved, and after milking he took off his boots by the stove and seemed to doze, while Tira strained the milk and washed her dishes. She was still sure that she and the child were to go. When would it be? Would the warning come quickly? She wanted to leave the waiting house in order, the house that seemed to know so much more about it all than she did. The fire had gone down in the stove, but though the night was warm, Tenney still sat by the hearth, huddled now in his chair, as if he wanted the comforting of that special spot: the idea of the hearthstone, the beneficence of man's cooking place. Tira's mind was on the night, the warmth of it, the moist cool breath bringing the hylas' peeping. It made her melancholy as spring nights always had, even when she was most happy.

She thought of the willows feathering out on the road to her old home, and how the sight of them against the sky, that and the distant frogs, made her throat thick with the clamor of a rising fear. The river road was the one she would take when she was turned out, even if the willows did look at her as she went by and lay that moist, cool hand of foreboding on her heart. She had a plan, sprung together like the pieces of a puzzle since she had known he was to send her away. There was a sawmill over the other side of the mountain and the men's boarding house. She could get work there. It would be strange if a woman so strong and capable could not get work.

Tenney stirred in his chair, roused himself from his huddled posture and got up. Was he going to tell her now?

"I guess mebbe I'll poke off to bed," he said, in his commonplace manner of that noon. "I've got to be up bright an' early."

"Ain't you finished on the knoll?" she ventured.

"Yes, or next to it. But I've got quite a number o' jobs to do round home."

He went up the stairs without a light, carrying his shoes in his hand, and Tira shivered once, thinking how horrible it was to go so softly in stockinged feet. She was not afraid of him. Only she did wish his feet would sound. She did not sleep that night. She brought in the cradle, put the baby in it, and drew it to the window and there she sat beside it, the night through, her hand on the broken hood. She had chosen a high, straight chair, so that she might be too uncomfortable to sleep, but she had no temptation to drop off. All her nerves were taut, her senses broad awake. She was ready, she knew, for anything. The night was peaceful, thrilled by little sounds of stirring life, and the house, whatever it guessed, had

forgotten all about her. Toward three o'clock she suddenly lost her sense of vitality. She was cold, and so sleepy now that the thought of bed was an ache of longing. She got up, found herself stiff and heavy-footed, lifted the child from his cradle and went into the bedroom with him. There she put him inside the sheets, and lay down beside him on the outside of the bed. She slept at once, but almost at once she was recalled. Tenney was standing in the bedroom door, looking at her.

"Wake up," he was saying, not unkindly. "Wake up."

She came drowsily awake, but before she was fully herself her feet were on the floor and she was rubbing her heavy eyes. The sun was streaming in.

"I've blazed the fire an' het me up some coffee," he said, still in that impersonal way which was so disturbing only because it was not his way. "I've harnessed up. I'm goin' to the street. You remember where that Brahma stole her nest? I've got to have two eggs for even dozens."

"Up in the high mow," said Tira. "Right under the beam."

She heard him go out through the shed, and she followed, to the kitchen, slowly, with the squalid feeling that comes of sleeping in one's day clothes, and there she found the fire low and his cup and plate on the bare table. She could see him through the window. There was the horse, hitched to the staple in the corner of the barn, there was the basket of eggs on the ground waiting for its even dozens."

"D'you find find any?" she called.

He did not answer, and she ran out to the barn and called up to the mow:

"You there? You find any?"

But the barn, in its soft darkness, with a beam of dusty

light here and there, knew nothing about him. He had not climbed to the mow, for the ladder was on the other side of the barn floor. She lifted it, brought it over, set it against the hay and climbed. She was broad awake now, and her taut muscles obeyed and liked it. She stepped on the hay, found the dark hole old Brahma chose for her secret hoarding place, and put in her hand, once, twice. Three eggs! Brahma must have thought she was pretty smart to lay three without having them stolen away from her. Tira put the eggs carefully in her apron pocket and hurried down the ladder, and out to the basket waiting on the ground. How many eggs did he want to make even dozens? Did he tell her? She could not remember. Probably he had forgotten himself, by now. She sat down on the step and took the eggs out in her lap, and then began to count and put them back again. The sun lay on them and they looked pretty to her in their brown fairness. She liked them, she thought, as she counted, liked all the farm things, the touch of them, the smell. Even old Charlie, standing there, smelled of the barn, and that was good, too. Five dozen, that was it, and one over. She put the extra egg in her pocket, got up and carried the basket to the wagon, placing it in front where it could sit safely between Tenney's feet. And at that minute Tenney himself came round the corner from the front of the house, and the day was so kind and the sun so warm on her face that it seemed a long time ago she had thought he meant to send her away, and she called to him:

"You might git a quarter o' tea, the kind they call English breakfast. An' a half a dozen lemons. It's terrible hard to think up any kind of a pie these days, 'twixt hay an' grass."

"Tea," said Tenney, as if he were putting it down in

his mind. "An' lemons. You might go out, in a half an hour or so, an' look at that calf."

He stepped into the wagon, took up the reins and drove away. Tira watched him out of the yard, and at last she had no suspicion of his coming back, as he had done so often, to surprise her. He was somehow—different. He was really gone. She went in, got her breakfast and ate it, this with more appetite than she had had for many weeks, and smiled at herself, thinking she was not sleepy yet, but when sleep came on her it would come like a cloud and smother her. She moved fast about the kitchen to get her work done before it came, and in perhaps an hour she remembered Tenney's telling her to have an eye to the calf. She smiled a little, grateful for even the tiniest impulse to smile, and told herself she wouldn't go out to look after any calf until she had looked at somebody else who ought to be awake. She went into the bedroom, and stopped a choked instant at the strangeness of the bed. The little coppery head was what she should have seen, but there was only the straight expanse of quilt, and a pillow, disarranged, lying crookedly near the top. She snatched up the pillow. There was the little coppery head. The baby was lying on his back, and over his face, carefully folded into a square, was her apron, the one Eugene Martin had torn away from her. The baby was dead.

XLIII

Tenney did not come home until two o'clock. When he drove into the yard he found Tira there, standing on the step. This was a day of clear sunlight, like that of yesterday, and the breeze moved her light rings of hair. Tenney glanced at her once, but, saying nothing, got out and began to unharness. Tira stood waiting. He led the horse into the barn, and when he came out and walked toward the house she was still waiting, a woman without breath even, one might have thought. When he was perhaps three feet from her she spoke, but in a quiet voice:

"Stop! You stan' right there an' I'll tell you. The doctor's been. I 'phoned him. I told him I overlaid the baby."

"Overlaid?" muttered Tenney, in a puzzled way.

Now a little feeling did manifest itself in her voice, as if he must be a fool not to have known these tragedies that come to mothers.

"Overlaid," she repeated, with the slightest tinge of scorn. "That's what women do sometimes, big heavy women! Roll over on the little creatur's an' lay on 'em so 't they can't breathe. I s'pose they can't help it, though. They're tired. I told him I done that. He was sorry for me. I asked him if the crowner'd come, an' I'd have to swear to't, an' he said no. I was glad o' that, though mebbe it's no worse to swear to anything than 'tis to say it. He was terrible good to me. I told him baby'd got to lay over to Mountain Brook, side o' mother, an' he

said he was goin' there an' he'd git one of 'em to dig the little grave. I told him you're all run down, your foot behavin' so, an' you wouldn't be able to do nothin', an' I was 'most afraid o' your givin' out, when I told you. So he's goin' to send the man with the little coffin."

There was no faintest tremor of bitterness or gibing in this. It was the simplest statement of facts. Tenney had stood perfectly still, but now he lifted one hand and looked at it casually, as he had that other time. He made an uncertain step, as if to pass her and enter the house, but Tira stretched out her arms. They barred the way.

"No," she said, "you ain't comin' in."

"Ain't comin' in?" repeated Tenney.

He looked up at her, but his glance fell at once to the trembling hand.

"No," said Tira, "you ain't comin' into this house ag'in till he's carried out of it. I've made you up a bed in the lower barn an' I've set you out suthin' to eat there. Day after to-morrer mornin' the doctor's comin' over after me an' baby—or send somebody, if he can't come—an' he's goin' to see to the minister an' all. He was terrible sorry for me. An' that night, day after to-morrer night, you can come back into the house; but you can't come before."

She went in and shut the door behind her, and Tenney heard the key turn sharply in the lock. He stood there several minutes, moistening his dry lips and looking down at his hands, and then he, too, turned about and went down to the lower barn, where he found a bed made up and a cold lunch on a little table. But while he ate he wondered, in an absent muse, about the bed. It was the old four-poster he had packed away in the shed chamber. How had she carried the heavy hardwood pieces down, fitted them together and corded them? He was curious enough to lift the tick to find out what she had used for

cord. Her new clothes-line; and there was the bed wrench in the corner by the chopping block. It looked as if, having done with it, she had thrown it there in a wild haste to get on with these things that must be done before he came. Even then, with his mind on his hands—not hands, it seemed to him, he could quite bear to touch food with—he wondered if some man had helped her. Had Martin been here again, or was it Raven? But, after all, nothing seemed to matter: only the queer state of his hands. That was the trouble now.

All through the next day he hung about the place, doing the barn work, milking, taking the milk to the house, but stopping there, for Tira met him at the door, took the pails from him, and carried them in without a word. He wondered vaguely whether, having denied him entrance to his own house, she meant to refuse him food also, but presently she appeared with a tray: meat and vegetables carefully arranged and the coffee he depended on. Then she pointed out a wooden box, a little chest that had lived up in the shed chamber, lifted the lid and bade him note the folded garments within: he must change to-morrow, and these were his clean clothes. Occasionally he glanced at her, but he could not see that she looked very different. She was always pale. Early in the morning of the third day she appeared with hot water and a basket filled with what seemed to him at first a queer assortment of odds and ends.

"Here," she said, "here's your shavin' things. I'll set the little lookin' glass up ag'inst the beam. Here's your razor. I'll fill the mug. Now, you shave you. If anybody should happen to see you, they'd say 'twa'n't fittin' for a man to have his baird all over his face, day of his baby's funeral."

The glass, with its picture of a red and blue house and

a cedar tree, she set against a beam, but it escaped her fingers and fell forward and cracked straight across the little house. She picked it up, balanced it against the beam and held it, with a frowning care, until it was secure.

"Sign of a death!" she said, as if to herself, but indifferently. "There! you shave you now, an' then I'll bring you out your breakfast an' carry in the things."

Tenney shaved before the little mirror with its crack across the house, and, as if she had been watching him, she appeared at the minute of his finishing. Now she was carrying a breakfast tray, poising it absorbedly, with the intentness of a mind on one thing only. It was a good breakfast, eggs and coffee and bacon, and the thick corn-cake he liked; also, there was his tin lunch box. She pulled out the little table, set the tray on it and brought his chair.

"There!" said she. "Now soon as ever you've finished eatin' you take your luncheon an' your axe an' go over to the long pastur' an' don't you show your head back here till it's time to fetch the cows. You can bring 'em along with you, an' I'll have the pails out on the step so 't you can start right off milkin'. An' when you've got through, you fetch the milk into the house, same as usual."

As she was leaving the barn she turned and the breeze lifted those little rings of her hair and Tenney, looking full at her now, groaned. It was not, he felt, any of the other things that had happened to them: only there was always breeze enough, even on the stillest day, to stir her hair. Now it seemed to be the only thing in the world with life in it.

"I shall tell 'em," she said clearly, as if she wanted him to understand and remember—and she did not look at him, but across the road and up the slope where the hut stood

waiting for her—"the doctor an' all the rest I've got to see, you was so sick over it, you couldn't come."

Then she stepped out of the picture she had made against the smiling day, the dark interior of the barn framing her, and walked, with her free-swinging step, to the house. And Tenney ate his breakfast, took his luncheon box and axe, and started for the woods. But he had not got out of the yard when she called to him. He stopped and she came running; she was no longer pale, and her eyes were rimmed with red. She came up with him.

"Isr'el," she said, "you think o' this. You think of it all day long. 'I'm goin' through it alone,' you says to yourself mebbe, after you've got off there into the woods. 'But I ain't alone. He'll be with me, the Lord Jesus Christ.' An' you remember there's that to think on. An' there's forgiveness. Isr'el, you lay down your axe. You let me take holt o' your hand."

He could only stare at her, and she took the axe from his hand and laid it at their feet. She took his hand and put it to her cheek. Then she took his other hand and laid that also on her cheek, and murmured a little formlessly, but in a way he sharply remembered as a means of stilling the baby. She lifted her head then, smiling a little, and still holding the hands. But before releasing them she stroked them softly and said, "There! there! Poor souls," she added, "poor souls!" Did she mean the unhappy hands, or all souls of men caught in the network of mysterious life? She picked up his axe and gave it to him as a mother might dismiss a child who was going to a distasteful task. "There!" she said again. "Now, you remember." She turned from him, and Tenney went, head down, to his work.

That afternoon, about three o'clock, Nan was in her

garden, busy with the peony bed. She was dressed in cotton crêpe the color of the soil, and her cheeks were red, like wild roses, and her ungloved hands also the color of mould. She was delightfully happy getting into the earth and the earth into her, and she looked it. Charlotte, coming on her across the grass, thought her face was like a bloom the rest of her had somehow made, as the earth was going to make red peonies. That is, I think Charlotte thought something of this sort, though she would not have put it in that way. Only she did have a great sense of Nan's entire harmony with the garden bed and the garden bed with her. Charlotte had other things on her mind, and she spoke without preamble:

"D'you know what's happened over to Tenney's?"

Nan got up from her knees, and her face was no longer the April-May face she had bent above the peonies.

"No," she said. "What is it?"

"I see doctor go by this mornin' in his car," said Charlotte, "carryin' Tira. In a couple of hours they come back. An' then he went by ag'in, goin' down home. I was on the lookout an' stopped him. I was kind of uneasy. An' he says: 'Yes, Mis' Tenney's baby's dead. She overlaid it,' he says. 'They feel terribly about it,' he says. 'Tenney run away from the services.'"

Nan stood staring. She was thinking not only about the baby and the Tenneys' feeling terribly—this Charlotte saw—but something farther behind, thinking back, and thinking keenly.

"I didn't say nothin' to nobody," Charlotte continued, "but the more I thought on't the more stirred up I got. The baby gone, an' she there all alone! So I run over. I knocked an' knocked, an' not a sound. Then, as I was turnin' away, I got a glimpse inside the kitchen winder, an' if you'll believe me there she set, hat an' all on, an'

her hands full o' daffies. You know them big double daffies always come up in their grass. Well!"

Nan threw down her trowel.

"I'll go over," she said. "We'll both go."

"What I come for," Charlotte hesitated, as they crossed the grass, "was whether I better say anything to anybody."

Nan knew she meant Raven.

"No," she said, "Oh, I don't know! We can't tell till we see."

Nan remembered she had not washed the earth off her hands, and yet, though they were passing her door, she could not stop. When they came in sight of the house, there was Tira in the doorway. She had taken off her hat now, and there was no daffies in her hands. She looked so commonplace, if her height and nobility could ever be less august, that Nan felt a sudden drop in her own anxiety. Tira called to them.

"Couldn't you come in a minute? I'd be pleased to have you."

They went up the path, and when they stood at the foot of the steps, confronting her, Nan saw how she had changed. And yet not tragically: she was merely, one would have said, entirely calm, the stillest thing in that pageant of the moving day.

"I'd be pleased," she said, "if you'd walk in."

She looked at Nan, and Charlotte at once turned away, saying, as she went:

"If there's anything—well, I'll be over."

Nan and Tira went in, Nan holding Tira's hand in her earthy one.

"Let's sit here," said Nan, crossing the room to the sofa between the side windows. She was not sure of anything about this talk except that she must keep her hand

on Tira. She noticed that the double daffies, a great bunch of them, were lying on the table. Tira was smiling faintly. She drew a deep breath. It sounded as if she had been holding herself up to something and had suddenly let go.

"Seems good to set," she said. "I ain't hardly set down to-day except——" She had it in mind to say except when she was in the car, carrying the baby over to Mountain Brook, but it seemed too hard a thing to say.

"If you'd just lie down," said Nan, "I'd sit here."

"No," said Tira, "I can't do that. I'm goin' over to Mountain Brook."

"Not again? Not to-day?"

"Yes, right off. I'm goin' to carry them daffies. He didn't have no flowers, the baby didn't. I never thought on't—then. But he never had none. He played with a daffy, 'most the last thing. I've got to git 'em over there."

"Not to-day, Tira," urged Nan. "You wouldn't get back till after dark."

"I shouldn't come back to-night," said Tira. "The Donnyhills were real good to me. They come to the grave. They'd admire to have me pass the night."

"Then," said Nan, "you wait till I go home and wash my hands, and I'll ask Mr. Raven for his car and you and I'll go over. Just we two."

"No," said Tira. " 'Twouldn't do me no good to ride. When I've got anything on my mind I can't do better'n walk it off. You let me be!"

The last was a sharp, sudden cry, like the recoil from an unlooked-for hurt.

"I see," said Nan. "Yes, you must walk. I should want to, myself. But in the morning, Tira—mayn't I come over after you?"

Tira considered, her eyes on Nan's hand and her own clasped, lying on Nan's knee.

"Yes," she said, "you better. You come to the Donny-hills'. Yes, you come."

Then she considered again, and began one of her slow, difficult meanderings, where the quickness of her heart and brain ran ahead of her tongue's art to interpret them.

"Seems if you knew," she said, " 'most everything that's gone on."

"Yes," said Nan, at a venture, and yet truthfully. "I think I've known."

"An' now it's come to an end," said Tira. "Or if it ain't, it's on the way to it. An' seems if you ought to know the whole. You're tough enough to stan' up to 't."

"Yes," said Nan simply, "I'm very tough. Nothing's going to hurt me."

"I bring," said Tira, still with difficulty, "bad luck. Some folks do. Folks set by me a spell. Then they stop. They think I'm goin' to be suthin' they'd do 'most anything for, an' then they seem to feel as if I wa'n't. An' there's no"—she sought for a word here and came out blunderingly—"no peace nor rest. Nor for me, neither. I ain't had peace nor rest. Except"—here she paused again and ended gravely, and not this time inadequately —"in him."

Nan understood. She was grave in her answer.

"Mr. Raven," she said. "I know."

The color flowed into Tira's face and she looked at Nan, with her jewel-like eyes.

"I'm goin' to tell you," she said, "the whole story. He's like—my God. Anything I could do for him—'twould be nothin'. Anything he asked of me——"

Here the light faded out from her face and the flesh of

it had that curious look of curdling, as if with muscular horror.

"But," she said, "here 'tis. S'pose it come on him, that —that"—she threw back her head in despair over her poverty of words—"s'pose it made him like—— Oh, I tell you there's suthin' queer about me, there's suthin' wrong. It ain't that I look different from other folks. I ain't ever meant to act different. I swear to my God I've acted like a decent woman—an' a decent girl—an' when I was little I never even had a thought! You tell me. You'd know."

Nan felt the hand on hers tighten. She put her other hand over it, and thought. What could she tell her? These matters were too deep in the causes of things for man to have caught a glimpse of them, except now and then darkly through some poet's mind. There was one word that, to a poet's mind only, might have illumined the darkness if only for an instant: beauty, that was the word. Mankind could not look on beauty such as this and not desire, for a moment at least, to possess it utterly. But these things belonged to the dark places where brute nature wrought her spells. And there were other beauties, other enchantments, and of these, what could Tira, her mind moulded by the brutal influences of her life, see, except as dreams of her own, not as having wholesome correspondences in the mind of man? Could she guess what the appeal of her loveliness would meet in Raven? Fastidious standards, pride of honor, pride of race. The jungle, in itself, was as hateful to him as it could be to her, who had been dragged through its fetid undergrowth with a violence that had cut indelible marks into her. But for him, Raven—as Nan believed she knew him and as Tira, her striving mind obscured by the veil of her remembered past, could never know—hadn't the jungle something

for him beyond choking savors and fierce destructive poisons? Didn't he know that even that miasma nourished wholesome virtues, strength, abstinence, infinite compassion, if you crossed the horrible expanse to the clear air beyond? Tira, fair as her mind was in its untouched integrity, hated the jungle, but it was a part of the wrong life had done her that she could not, highly as she worshiped Raven, keep herself from seeing his kinship to the natural earth as Martin's kinship with it, Tenney's—all the beasts who had desired her. How to tell her that? How to tell her that although it was most loving of her to save Raven from the curse she believed to be upon all men, he would save himself?

"They think," Tira continued, in a voice rough enough to hurt the ear, "there's suthin' about me—different. An' they feel as if, if they owned me body an' soul they'd be—I dunno what they'd be."

"They think they'd be gods," Nan's mind supplied. "You are beauty, Tira. You are the cup. They think if they could drink of you they would never thirst again."

"An' now," said Tira, "s'pose a man like—like him—s'pose it looked to him some minute he never'd so much as expected—s'pose it looked to him as if he'd be made if he owned me body an' soul. Well! That's easy, you say. If I love him, what's my body an' what's my soul? Offer 'em to him, quick. An' wouldn't I, if that was all? Wouldn't I?"

She called it sharply, in an angry challenge.

"Yes," said Nan quietly, "I know you would."

"Well," said Tira, "what then? It wouldn't be any more"—her eyes, glancing here and there in troubled search for help in her impossible task of speech—"like them daffies over there. 'Twould be—mud."

This, though it did not satisfy her, carried an ineffable

loathing, the loathing that had its seed in the pathway of her difficult life.

"Now," she said, "you set by him, don't you?"

"Yes," said Nan.

"If 'twas your body an' soul, they'd be nothin' to you if he needed 'em."

"Nothing."

"An' you're goin' to stan' by him, an' if you marry away from him——"

"Never mind that," said Nan. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you," said Tira, "to see what I mean. An' I want you to tell it or not to tell it, as it seems best. An' if ever the time comes, when it'll do him good to know I run away from him because he was my life an' my soul an' my God, you tell him. An' if it ain't best for him to know, you let it rest betwixt you an' me."

"But, Tira," said Nan, "you're coming back?"

Tira considered.

"You see," she answered finally, "I've got my walkin' papers, as you might say. The baby's gone. 'Twas the baby that made trouble betwixt his father an' me. An' now there won't be no reason for my hidin' in the shack up there or even passin' the time o' day with you, either of you. An' that's a kind of a runnin' away, ain't it? Shouldn't you call it runnin' away?"

She smiled dimly, and Nan said:

"Yes. But I shall come over to the Donnyhills' to-morrow."

"Yes," said Tira, "so do. Now I'd better go."

They got up and Nan put her hands on Tira's shoulders—and one hand was numb from that iron clasp—and stood looking at her. Nan was not a kissing woman, but she considered whether she should kiss her, to show

she loved her. She thought not. Tira's body had so revolted against life, the life of the earth that had grown up into a jungle, that it would be kinder to leave it inviolate even by a touch.

"Don't you want to change your mind?" Nan asked. "Mayn't I get the car? It's seven long miles, Tira."

"Not the way I'm goin'," said Tira. There was a little smile at the corners of her mouth. It was a kind smile, a mother smile. She meant to leave Nan reassured. "I go 'cross lots, by old Moosewood's steppin' stones."

Nan withdrew her hands and thought absently how thin Tira's shoulders were under her dress. She was like a ship, built for endurance and speed, but with all her loveliness in the beauty of bare line. Tira put on her hat and took up her daffodils and followed, out at the front door and down the path. Nan looked back.

"You've left the door open," said she. "Don't you want to lock up?"

"No," said Tira, "he'll see to it."

At the gate they parted, with a little smile from Tira, the kind that so strangely changed her into something more childlike than her youth.

"You come," she said, "in the mornin'. I shall be there, an' glad enough to have you."

She turned away and broke at once into her easy stride. Nan stood a minute watching her. Then something came up in her, a surge of human love, the pity of it all—Tira, Raven, the world, and perhaps a little of it Nan—and she ran after her. The tears were splashing down her face and blurring the bright day.

"Tira!" she called, and, as she came up with her, "darling Tira!"

"Why," said Tira, "you're cryin'! Don't you cry, darlin'. I never so much as thought I'd make you cry."

They put their arms about each other and their cheeks were together, wet with Nan's tears, and then—Nan thought afterward it was Tira who did it—they kissed, and loosed each other and were parted. Nan went home shaken, trembling, the tears unquenchably coming, and now she did not turn to look.

XLIV

Nan was very tired. She went to bed soon after dark and slept deeply. But she woke with the first dawn, roused into a full activity of mind that in itself startled her. There was the robin outside her window—was it still that one robin who had nothing to do but show you how bravely he could sing?—and she had an irritated feeling he had tried to call her. Her room was on the east and the dawn was still gray. She lay looking at it a minute perhaps after her eyes came open: frightened, that was it, frightened. Things seemed to have been battering at her brain in the night, and all the windows of her mind had been closed, the shutters fast, and they could not get in. But now the light was coming and they kept on battering. And whatever they wanted, she was frightened, too frightened to give herself the panic of thinking it over, finding out what she was frightened about; but she got up and hurried through her dressing, left a line on her pillow for the maid and went downstairs, out into a dewy morning. She had taken her coat, her motor cap and gloves. Once in the road she started to run, and then remembered she must not pass Tenney's running, as if the world were afire, as things were in her mind. But she did walk rapidly, and glancing up when she was opposite the house, saw the front door open as Tira had left it, and a figure in one of the back rooms outlined against the window of the front one where she and Tira had sat. That would be Tenney. He must be accounting to himself for the lone-

some house, though indeed Tira would have left some word for him. When she went up the path to Raven's door she was praying to the little imps of luck that Amelia might not be the first to hear her. She tapped softly, once, twice, and then Raven's screen came up and he looked down at her. They spoke a word each.

"Hurry," said Nan.

"Wait," he answered, and put down the screen.

When he came out, Nan met him on the top step where she had been sitting, trying harder still not to be frightened. But he, too, was frightened, she saw, and that this, to him also, meant Tira.

"Get your coat," she said. "She's gone. Over to Mountain Brook."

Raven's face did not alter from its set attention.

"Yes," said Nan, "the car. I'll tell you the rest of it on the way."

He got his coat and cap, and they went down to the garage together. Shortly, they were slipping out of the yard, and she, with one oblique glance, saw Amelia at a window in her nightie, and forgot to be frightened for the instant while she thought Amelia would be accounting for this as one of her tricks and compressing her lips and honorably saying nothing to Dick about it. Raven turned down the road and Nan wondered if she had even spoken the name of Mountain Brook.

"Let her out," said she.

Raven did let her out. He settled himself to his driving, and still he had not questioned her. Nan turned her face to him and spoke incisively against the wind of their going:

"The baby died. Tira lay on it in her sleep. That was Monday. It was buried yesterday. At Mountain Brook. Tira went back to Mountain Brook yesterday afternoon,

to carry the baby some flowers"—the moment she said this she saw how silly it was and wondered why she had not seen it, why she had been such a fool as not to be frightened sooner. "She said she would spend the night with those Donnyhills." But had Tira thrown in the Donnyhills to keep Nan from being frightened?

Raven gave no sign of having heard. They were speeding. The east behind them was a line of light, and the mists were clearing away. When they turned into the narrow river road, the gray seemed to be there waiting for them, for this was the gorge with the steep cliff on one side and the river on the other, always dark, even at midday, with moss patches on the cliffs and small streams escaping from their fissures and tumbling: always the sound of falling water.

"The Donnyhills?" Raven asked. "Don't I remember them? Sort of gypsy tribe, shif'less."

"Yes, that's it. She must have known them when she lived over there, before she married."

"That's where we go, is it?"

"No," said Nan, and now she wondered if she could keep her voice from getting away from her. "Stop where the cross cut comes out! Old Moosewood's stepping stones. She was going to cross by them, where old Moosewood——" There she stopped, to get a hand on herself, knowing she was going to tell him, who knew it before she was born, the story of Moosewood, the Indian, found there dead.

If the stab of her disclosures drew blood from Raven she could not have told. The road was narrower still, and rougher. Nan had forgotten where the stepping stones came out. He was slackening now. She knew the curve and the point where the cliff broke on the left, for the little path that continued the cross cut on the

other side of the road. He got out without a glance at her, stepped to the water side of the roadway, and she followed him. And it was exactly what her fear had wakened her to say. There was no sign of Tira, but, grotesquely, her hat was lying on one of the stepping stones, as if she had reckoned upon its telling them. Raven ran down the path and into the shallow water near the bank, and again Nan followed him, and, at the edge of the water, stopped and waited. When the water was above his waist, he stooped, put down his arms and brought up something that, against the unwilling river, took all his strength. And this was Tira. He came in shore, carrying her, and walking with difficulty, and Nan ran up the bank before him. He laid Tira's body on the ground, and stood for an instant getting his breath, not looking at her, not looking at Nan.

"It's over," he said then quietly. "It's been over for hours." That was the instant of reaction, and he shook himself free of it. "Where do they live?" he asked Nan brusquely. "Yes, I know. We'll take her there. I'll hold her. You drive."

He lifted Tira again, put her into the car as if a touch might hurt her, and sat there holding her, waiting for Nan. And Nan got in and drove on to the Donnyhills'.

All that forenoon was a madness of haste and strangeness. It is as well to look at it through the eyes of Nan, for Raven, though he seemed like himself and was a model of crisp action, had no thoughts at all. To Nan it was a long interval from the moment of stopping before the little gray Donnyhill house (and rousing more squalid Donnyhills than you would have imagined in an underground burrow of wintering animals), through indignities they had to show Tira's body, the hopeless effort of rousing it again to its abjured relations with an

unfriendly world. And while they worked on the tenantless body, the Donnyhill boy, a giant with a gentle face, said he could drive, and was sent with Raven's car to the farmer who had a telephone, and the doctor came and Nan heard herself explaining to him that she woke up worried over Tira, because Tira had spoken of the stepping stones. The doctor shook his head over it all. The woman had been almost beside herself after the child's death. Perfectly quiet about it, too. But that was the kind. Nan didn't think she had any intention—any design?—and Nan hastened to say Tira had told why she was going, told it quite simply. She had forgotten to give the child any flowers. Of course, that did show how wrought up she was. And there were the stepping stones. They were always tricky. Here the doctor brought up old Moosewood, and said there were queer things. When you came to think of it, New England's a queer place. Suicide? No! Inquest? No! He guessed he knew. Then he went away and promised to send the other man who would be the last to meddle with the body of Tira.

The Donnyhill house was still, for all the children, with consolatory chunks of bread in hand, had been sent off into the spacious playing places about them. Mrs. Donnyhill, who looked like a weatherworn gypsy, went about muttering to herself passionately sorrowful lamentations: "God help us! poor creatur'! poor soul!" and she and Nan bathed Tira's body—somehow they were glad to wash off the river water—and put on it a set of clothes Nan suspected of being Mrs. Donnyhill's only decent wear. For the folded garments were all by themselves in the bedroom bureau, and it was true that the women in this region had forethought for a set to be buried in. When this was over and before the coming of the other man who was to have rights over Tira's body, Mrs. Donnyhill

remembered Raven and Nan might not have breakfasted, and gave them bread and strong tea—brewed over night, it seemed to have been. They ate and drank, and she moved about tucking children's tyers and sweaters into holes of concealment and making her house fitting for Tira's majesty, all the time muttering her pleas to God.

About noon, when Tira was lying in the front room, in her solitude, no more to be touched until she was put into her coffin, Raven came in from his steady walk up and down before the house and went to Nan, where she sat by the window in the other front room. The strength had gone out of her. She sat up straight and strong, but her lips were ashen. As they confronted each other, each saw chiefly great weariness. Raven's face, Nan thought, was like a mask. It was grave, it was intent, but it did not really show that he felt anything beyond the general seriousness of the moment.

"Get your things," he said to her. "We'll go back. Tenney's got to be told, and I suppose Charlotte or somebody will have to do something to his house."

They both knew the strange commotion attendant here on funerals. Sometimes houses were upturned from top to bottom and cleaned, even to the paint. Nan put out a hand and touched his arm.

"Don't do that, Rookie," she said, "don't take her back there. She mustn't go into that house again. She wouldn't want it."

Raven considered a moment. His face did not lose its mask-like calm.

"No," he said then, "she mustn't. She must come to my house—or yours."

"No," said Nan again, still keeping her hand on his arm, and aching so with pity that she was humbly grateful to him for letting her touch his sleeve, "she mustn't do

that either. It would be queer, Rookie. It would 'make talk.' She wouldn't like that. Don't you see?"

He did see. He gave a concurring motion of the head and was turning away from her, but Nan rose and, still with her hand on his arm, detained him.

"We'll leave her here," she said. "That woman—she's darling. We can make up to her afterward. But you mustn't appear in it again, except to tell Tenney, if you'd rather. Though I could do that. Now, let's go."

He was ready. But when he had reached the little entry between this room and the one where Tira's body lay, she ran to him.

"Rookie," she said, "Mrs. Donnyhill's out there with the children. Don't you want to go in and see Tira?"

Raven stood for a minute, considering. Then he crossed the entry and Nan, finding he could not, for some reason, put his hand on the latch, opened the door for him, and he went in. But only a step. He stood there, his eyes on the poor bed where Tira lay, and then, as if he were leaving a presence, he stepped back into the entry, and Nan understood that he was not even carrying with him the memory of her great majesty of beauty. She thought she understood. Even Tira's face was to be left covered. She was to be inviolate from the eyes of men. In a few minutes he had brought round the car, Nan had arranged things with Mrs. Donnyhill, and they drove out into the day—blazing now, like midsummer—and so home. And all the way they did not speak, until, passing Tenney's, the door open and the house with a strange look of being asleep in the sun, Nan said:

"Leave me here. I'll see him and then go on."

Raven did not answer. He drove past, to her own gate, and Nan, understanding she was not to move fur-

ther in any direction, got out. Raven, perhaps feeling his silence had been unmerciful to her, spoke quietly:

"Run and get a bath and a sleep. I'll see him. I'll come for you if you're needed."

He turned the car and drove back, and Nan went in to her waiting house. Raven stopped before Tenney's and, since the front door was open, halted there and knocked. No answer. Then he went round to the side door and knocked again, and called out several times, and the sound of his voice brought back to him, like a sickness, the memory of Tenney's catamount yell when he had heard it that day in the woods. No answer. The house was asleep and a calf blared from the barn. He went back to the car, drove home, and found Jerry waiting in the yard and Charlotte at the door. Dick was in his chair down under the trees, his mother beside him, reading. It was so unusual to see Amelia there that Raven wondered idly—not that it mattered—he could meet a regiment of Amelias with this callousness upon him—if Dick had beguiled her away so that she might not pounce on him when he returned. He got out of the car stiffly. He was, he felt at that instant, an old man. But if physical ineptitude meant age, Jerry and Charlotte were also old, for Jerry was bewildered beyond the possibility of speech and Charlotte shaken out of her calm.

"You come into the kitchen," she said, and Raven followed her, and sank into a chair, set his elbows on the table, and leaned his head in his hands. He was very tired, but Mrs. Donnyhill's boiled tea was inexorably keeping him up. Charlotte, standing above him, put her hand on his shoulder.

"Johnnie," she said, "Isr'el Tenney's been here. He wants you to give him back his gun."

"Oh," said Raven, taking his head out of his hands and sitting up. "His gun?"

"He says," Charlotte continued, her voice shaking, "Tira's run away. I told him the last I see o' Tira was yesterday afternoon standin' in her own door, an' he asked if she had her things on an' I didn't know what to say. An' he said somebody down the road said you went by 'fore light, drivin' like blazes. An' you had a woman in the car. An' Tira'd run away."

Raven was looking up at her, a little smile on his lips, but in his eyes such strange things that Charlotte caught his head to her and held it against her breast.

"Yes," he said, "yes, Charlotte, Tira has run away. She went yesterday, over to Mountain Brook. She tried to cross the stepping stones. She's over at the Donnyhills' now. She's going to stay there till she's buried. I'll go and tell him. Where do you think he is?"

Charlotte still held his head against her warm heart.

"You don't s'pose," she whispered, "you don't believe she done *that?*"

"What?" he answered, and then her meaning came to him as his first hint of what Tira might have done. He drew himself away from the kind hand and sat up straight. "No," he said sharply. "It was an accident. She never meant"—it had come upon him that this was what she had meant and what she had done. But it must not be told of her, even to Nan. "Where's Tenney?" he said. "Where do you think he is?"

Charlotte hesitated.

"He's up there," she said, after a moment while Raven waited, "up to the hut. He said he's goin' to git his gun out o' there if he had to break an' enter. He said he see it through the winder not two days ago. An' Jerry hollered after him if he laid hand to your property he'd

have the law on him. Jerry was follerin' on after him, but you went by in the car an' I called on him to stop. O Johnnie, don't you go up there, or you let Jerry an' me go with you. If ever a man was crazed, that man's Isr'el Tenney, an' if you go up there an' stir him up!"

"Nonsense!" said Raven, in his old kind tone toward her, and Charlotte gave a little sob of relief at hearing it again. "I've got to see him and tell him what I've told you. You and Jerry stay where you are. Tenney's not dangerous. Except to her," he added bitterly to himself, as he left the house. "And a child in its cradle. My God! he was dangerous to her!" And Charlotte, watching from the window, saw him go striding across the road and up the hill.

Raven, halfway up, began to hear an unexpected sound: blows, loud and regular, wood on wood. When he had passed the turning by the three firs he knew, really before his eyes confirmed it. Tenney was there at the hut, and he had a short but moderately large tree trunk—almost heavier than he could manage—and was using it as a battering ram. He was breaking down the door. Raven, striding on, shouted, but he was close at hand before Tenney was aware of him and turned, breathless, letting the log fall. He had actually not heard, and Raven's presence seemed to take him aback. Yet he was in no sense balked of his purpose. He faced about, breathless from his lifting and ramming, and Raven saw how intense was the passion in him: witnessed by the whiteness of his face, the burning of his eyes.

"I come up here," said Tenney, "after my gun. You can git it for me an' save your door."

Raven paid no attention to this.

"You'd better come along down," he said. "We'll stop at my house and talk things over."

This he offered in that futile effort the herald of bad news inevitably makes, to approach it slowly.

"Then," said Tenney, "you hand me out my gun. I don't leave here till I have my gun."

"Tenney," said Raven, "I've got bad news for you."

"Yes," said Tenney blankly. "She's run away. You carried her off this mornin'. You don't need to tell me that."

"I didn't carry her off," said Raven, speaking slowly and clearly, for he had a feeling that Tenney was somehow deaf to him. "Tira went over to Mountain Brook yesterday. Nan knew she was going, and this morning she was worried, because she got thinking of Tira's crossing the stepping stones. She asked me to take her over there. We found her. She was drowned."

Tenney's eyes had shifted from Raven's face. The light had gone out of them, and they clung blankly to the tree spaces and the distance.

"Have it your own way," said Tenney, in as blank a tone. "Settle it amongst ye."

"We shall go over to-morrow," said Raven. "Will you go with us?"

"No," said Tenney.

"Drownded herself," he said, at length. "Well, that's where it led to. It's all led to that."

"She slipped," said Raven roughly. "Don't you understand? Anybody could, off those wet stones."

"You open that door," said Tenney, "an' gimme my gun."

But Raven went on talking to him, telling him quietly and reasonably what they had judged it best to do, he and Nan. If Tira had wanted the baby buried over there by her mother, wouldn't she want to be buried there herself?

"Very well, then. We'll arrange things. The day after"—he could not bring himself to put the bare ceremonial that would see her out of the world into the words familiar to the country ear—"that will be the day. We shall go over. We'll take you with us."

"No," said Tenney, "you needn't trouble yourselves. I sha'n't go over there. Nor I sha'n't keep nobody else from goin'."

By this Raven judged he meant that he would not interfere with their seeing Tira out of the world in their own way. The man had repudiated her. It was a relief. It seemed to leave her, in her great freedom, the more free.

"Come down now," said Raven, "to my house. We'll have something to eat."

That was all he could think of, to keep the stricken creature within sound of human voices.

"I ain't hungry," said Tenney. "An' if I was"—here he stopped an instant and a spasm shot across his face—"she left me cooked up."

"All right," said Raven. "Then you go home now, and later in the day I'll come over and see if you've thought of anything else."

He believed the man should not, in his despairing frame of mind, be left alone. Tenney turned, without a look at him, and went off down the slope. Raven watched him round the curve. Then he took out the key from under the stone, remembering it need never be put there again, went in and locked the door. Suddenly he felt deadly sick. He went to the couch, lay down and closed his eyes on the blackness before them. If he had a wish, in this infinitude of desolation, it was that he might never open them again on the dark defiles of this world. It was dusk when he did open them, and for a minute he had difficulty

in remembering why he was there and the blow that had struck him down to such a quivering apprehension of what was coming next. Then, before he quite found out, he learned what had waked him. There was a voice outside—Tenney's voice, only not Tenney's as he had known it—whimpering, begging in a wild humility:

"You there? You let me in. You there? For God's sake let me in."

Raven was at once clearly awake. His mind was, after its interlude of darkness, ready. He got up, and opened the door.

"Come in," he said. "Yes, leave the door open. I've been asleep. It's close in here."

Tenney came in, not so much limping as stumbling. He seemed to be shorter in stature. His head was bent, his body had sagged together as if not a muscle of it had strength to do its part. Raven pulled forward a chair, and he sank into it.

"What do you s'pose," he began—and the voice was so nearly a whimper that Raven was not surprised to see tears on his cheeks—"what do you s'pose I wanted my gun for? To use on you? Or him? No. On me. But I don't know now as I've got the strength to use it. I'm done."

This was his remorse for the past as he had made it, and Raven had no triumph in it, only a sickness of distaste for the man's suffering and a frank hatred of having to meet it with him.

"You know," said Tenney, looking up at him, sharply now, as if to ascertain how much he knew, "she didn't do it. The baby wa'n't overlaid. God! did anybody believe she could do a thing like that? She slep' like a cat for fear suthin' would happen to him."

"What," asked Raven, in horror of what he felt was

coming, and yet obliged to hear, "what did happen to him?"

Tenney stretched out his hands. He was looking at them, not at Raven.

"I can't git it out o' my head," he continued, in a broken whisper, "there's suthin' on 'em. You don't see nothin', do you? They look to me——"

There he stopped, and Raven was glad he did not venture the word. What had Raven to say to him? There seemed not to be anything in the language of man, to say. But Tenney came alive. He was shaking with a great eagerness.

"I tell you," he said, "a man don't know what to do. There was that—that—what I done it to—he wa'n't mine."

He looked at Raven in a hunger of supplication. He was almost dying to be denied.

"Yes," said Raven steadily. "He was yours."

"How do you know?" shrieked Tenney, as if he had caught him. "She talk things over?"

Raven considered. What could he say to him?

"Tenney," he said at last, "you haven't understood. You haven't seen her as she was, the best woman, the most beautiful——"

Here he stopped, and Tenney threw in angrily, as if it were a part of his quarrel with her:

"She was likely enough. But what made her," he continued violently, "what made her let a man feel as if her mind was somewheres else? Where was her mind?"

That was it, Raven told himself. Beauty! it promised ineffable things, even to these eyes of jealous greed, and it could not fulfil the promise because everything it whispered of lay in the upper heavens, not on earth. But Ten-

ney would not have heard the answer even if Raven could have made it. He was broken. He bent his head into his hands and sobbed aloud.

"Good? 'Course she was good. Don't I know it? An' she's gone. An' me—what be I goin' to do?"

Somehow Raven understood that he was not thinking of his desolate house and lonesome mind, but of himself in relation to the law he had broken and the woman's heart, broken, too. Grotesquely almost, came to his mind Tira's grave reminder: "He's a very religious man." And Tenney seemed to have come, by some path of his own, round to the same thing.

"If there was a God——"

"Oh, yes," Raven threw in, moved by some power outside himself, "there is a God."

"If there was," said Tenney, "he couldn't forgive me no more'n He could Cain. There's *that* on my hands. When there's that——"

He stopped before the vision of the man God had scourged into exile for the shedding of blood. To Raven there was suddenly a presence beside them: not a Holy Presence, such as they might well have invoked, but Old Crow. And he remembered how Old Crow had eased the mind of Billy Jones.

"Tenney," he said, "don't you remember what Tira believed in? She believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. She believed He could forgive sins."

"Do you believe it?" Tenney hurled at him. "Can He forgive—that?"

Again he stretched out his hands.

"Yes," said Raven. "He can forgive that."

"An' I be," Tenney continued, in his scriptural phrasing, "whiter than snow?"

Raven found himself halting. There were, behind this

vision of the symbol by which God made Himself manifest to man, reserves of strict integrities.

"Tenney," he said, "you've killed a child. Your child. You're a criminal. The only thing you can do to get back among men is to give yourself up. To the law. And take your medicine."

"O my God!" cried Tenney. "Tell it? Tell that? Bring it up afore judge an' jury how I thought——"

"Don't tell me what you thought," said Raven sharply. "You've said it once. You were crazy, and you killed your child."

"An' what if——" he began, and Raven finished for him:

"What if they hang you? We can't go into that. There's your first step. Give yourself up."

The next instant he was sorry for the brutality of this. But Tenney did not find it brutal. Strangely it seemed to him a way out, the only way. He was brooding. Suddenly he looked up.

"You told me," he said, apparently in wonder, "you didn't believe."

What to say? "I believe in God Who is letting me—tenderly, oh, with such pity for my human foolishness—seize whatever crutch I can to help you over this dark mortal way?" Could he say that? No, it was true, but somehow it couldn't be said.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "I believe."

"Then," said Tenney eagerly, "you pray with me."

Raven, thinking on this afterward, knew he did pray, in what words he never could recall, and that the substance of it was Forgiveness: Forgive our sins. And that when he had finished Tenney completed his faltering close with "For Christ's sake. Amen!" And that because Tenney looked at him for confirmation, he, Raven,

repeated it after him, humbly and with sincerity. And when, shaken both of them beyond the possibility of speech, they rose from their knees, they heard a voice outside, Nan's voice:

"Rookie, let me in."

Raven opened the door, and found her there, and Dick was with her.

"You shouldn't have come up here," he said to Dick. "You're not supposed to climb hills."

"He had to," said Nan. "I came up and listened and I heard voices. So I went back again and asked Charlotte for sandwiches. And Dick would come. But I carried the basket." She had gone past him into the room and was unpacking food. "No, Mr. Tenney, you stay. They're for you, too. We're all tired out, you know. Let's keep together all we can. We're so lonesome. Tira! but she's the only one that isn't lonesome. *She's* gone to heaven. Look! hot coffee, too. Now you eat, both of you. There's nothing like grub."

In the midst of this, Dick had gone round the table and put out his hand to Tenney and said:

"H' are you, Tenney?" and Tenney, dazed, had given his.

Raven found he was hungry and began to eat, and Nan somehow saw to it that Tenney also ate. And Raven, at least, felt in the breath of the spring night, something ebbing there in the hut. What was it: waves of wild human turmoil finding a channel where they could flow equably? Nan and Dick went out on the veranda while the two finished, and Raven noted the murmur of their voices and wondered a little, idly, whether they were better friends—lovers or only better friends. Presently Nan was back again. She brushed up their crumbs and packed the dishes into the basket.

"Now, Mr. Tenney," she said, "this is what we've done. When I found you were both up here, I had Jerry go over and get your cows. He milked and I strained the milk. I locked up the house, too. Here's your key. What makes you go back to-night? It'll be easier by daylight. Rookie, couldn't he sleep up here?"

"Yes," said Raven, "of course he can. We'll be down to breakfast, tell Charlotte."

Tenney offered no preference or opinion. He sat there, his key—the key Tira had lost, he did remember vaguely —on the table before him. Nan, with the air of there being no more to do, wafted Dick away with her. And Raven and Tenney spent the night together in the hut. Raven did not sleep. He had an impression that Tenney did not, either. It seemed to him a watch with the dead.

XLV

In that darkest minute when it seems as if dawn will never come or, if it does, to bring with it a deeper chill, Raven, for the first time in weeks, found his old enemies upon him: the fear of life, the terrible distaste for continuance in a world where there is no escape, even in going on. Was this grief for Tira? Her needs had pulled him out from his own sickness of mind, and now that she would never need anything again, must he return to the dark dwelling of his mental discontent and crouch there whimpering as Tenney had whimpered when he came to him here a few hours ago? And slowly, achingly, his mind renewedly accepted the iron necessity which is living. There was no giving up. There was no escape. He had to live because the other choice—was it the fool's choice or the coward's?—was not only unthinkable, but it did no good. There was no escape. And side by side with the sickness of distaste for life as he found it, was another distaste, as strong: for this malady of nostalgia itself. He could not abide it another instant. It was squalid, it was unclean, and he found his mind crying out: "Help me! for God's sake help me!" But it was not to God he cried. It was to Old Crow. And Old Crow heard. Indubitably he heard. For there was an answer. "Yes! yes!" the answer kept beating in his mind. He would help.

And what of Tira? Was she resolved into the earth that made her? Or would she also help? He wondered why she had died. Was it because she had been unable

to face the idea of the little boy who was not right taking his maimed innocence into some other state alone? No. Tira had her starkly simple faith. She had her Lord Jesus Christ. She would, as simply as she believed, have trusted the child to Him. Did she so fear to face her life with Tenney—the hurtling, blind, elemental creature with blood on his hands—that she took herself away? No. Tira was no such person. There was a wild, high courage in her that, the more terrible the challenge, responded the more valiantly. Why did she take herself away? And what was she in these walls that had been dedicated to her safety? Was she existent, like Old Crow? Was she here with Raven when his mind clamored for peace? Did she, too, answer "Yes, yes!" She had, he concluded, gone. It seemed as if she had withdrawn herself, by her own will, for some inexorable reason. He remembered threnodies that saw the beloved dead absorbed into the course of nature: the dawn, the sunset, the season's round, the flowers that spring ever renewed to deck the laureate hearse. And as his mind sought her in the night breeze that came in to fan him and Tenney alike, in the sky where the stars, through arboreal spaces, never looked so piercingly bright, he did seem to be aware of an actual intelligence. But it was assuredly not Tira and it was not Old Crow. It was Anne.

Whether his mind had been so occupied by these other more immediate things that she could not get the connection between her will and his, whether she now found him, bereft of Tira, free to do her unchanged bidding, he could not see. But Anne was there. At least, the knowledge of her was in his mind, insisting on being heard, and insisting as it never had in this present life. For whereas then her attack had been subtly organized, Anne herself, the directing general, behind almost invisible potencies of

suggestion and finesse, now here she was in the open, plainly commanding him, as if this might be the only fight she should be able to manage, and it must be to the finish. And what she wanted was plain obedience touching the disposal of her trust. It was not his love she was asking for now. That, he concluded, though without bitterness, might not look desirable to her any more. Or perhaps she had learned how futile it was to ask it. Or, indeed, was all love futile beyond the grave? No, for he loved Tira withdrawn into her impenetrable seclusion—but that he must not think of. The fight was on, the conclusive fight with Anne. And he seemed to be battling for the integrity of his own soul, the freedom of his will. He sat up on his couch, and heard himself say aloud:

"No. I won't do it. You can't make me."

Was this the way to speak to Anne, to whom all the reticences and delicacies of life were native air? But she was not Anne now so much as the enemy of sane conduct here in this world and of his struggling will.

"D'you speak?" called Tenney from the next room.

"All right," said Raven, and realized he must not speak again.

Thereafter the fight with Anne went on within the arena of his mind. He poured himself forth to her. For the first time in his life, he admitted her to his inner beliefs and sympathies. He would not, he told her, devote her money to the debasing of the world. Wherever she was, she had not learned a page more than she had known when she wrote that letter to him about the things that help the world and the things that hinder. He didn't believe, he told her, she really wanted to learn. She wanted only to be obeyed, to put her money where she had ordered it to go merely because she had ordered it.

"You can't have it, Anne," he repeated, whenever his

mind halted in argument, and she kept pressing him back, back into his old hopeless subserviency. "I'll tell you where it's going. It's going to France. There won't be any palace, Anne. It's going into the land. It's going to help little French boys and French girls to grow up with time enough and strength enough to put their beautiful intelligence into saving the earth. It's going to be that sort of a bulwark between them and the enemies of the earth. And that's the only road to peace. Don't you see it is, Anne? Don't you see it? You won't get peace by talking about it. You wasted your money when you did it, all through war-time. You harmed and hindered. Don't you know you did? If you don't, what's the use of dying? Don't they know any more there than we do here? Anyway, I know more than you did when you made your will, and that's what I'm going to do. Train up beautiful intelligences, Anne, the ones that are likeliest to work it all out practically: how to live, that's what they're going to work out, how to live, how to help the world to live. Don't you see, Anne? For God's sake, don't you see?"

She didn't see, or, if she did, she was too angry to give him the comfort of knowing she did. But suddenly, in the midst of her anger, there was a break, a stillness, though it had been still before. Perhaps it was most like a stillness of mind, and he felt himself as suddenly awake to a certainty that Anne had done with him. Once before she had seemed to leave him, but this time it was for good. She had gone, wherever the road was open to her. He had armed his will and sent it out to fight her will. She was routed, and she would never challenge him again. Perhaps, in her scorn, she had repudiated him. Perhaps the world, if it were called on to pronounce judgment, would repudiate him for betraying a dead woman's trust. Well,

let it. The impeccability of his own soul wasn't so very valuable, after all, weighed against what he saw as the indisputable values of mortal life. He lay back on his bed, exhausted by the fight, foolishly exhausted because, he told himself, there hadn't been any real Anne. Only her mind, as he had known it, and his own mind had been grappling, like two sides of an argument. But while he tried to dull himself with this denial of the possibilities beyond our sense, he knew underneath that there had been Anne. And she had gone. She would not come again.

Then he must have slept, for there was a gulf of forgetfulness, and when his eyes came open, it was on Tenney standing there in the doorway. Raven felt squalid after the night in his clothes, and Tenney looked to him in much the same case. Also Tenney was shrunken, even since he had come to the hut the day before, and then he had seemed not three-quarters of his height. He asked now, not as if he cared, but as if he wondered idly:

"D' I leave my ammunition up here?"

He had the gun in his hand.

"Let the gun alone," said Raven. He got up and took it away from him, and Tenney dumbly suffered it. "We'll go down now and have some breakfast, and Jerry'll do your chores."

"I can do my own chores," said Tenney. "I can go into the barn, I guess."

By this Raven understood that he did not mean to go into the house. Perhaps he was afraid of it. Men are afraid of houses that have grown sinister because of knowing too much.

That day was a curious medley of watchfulness over Tenney: for Raven felt the necessity of following him about to see he did himself no harm. He called him in to breakfast, but Tenney did not even seem to hear, and

stood brooding in the yard, looking curiously down at his lame foot and lifting it as if to judge how far it would serve him. Then Charlotte, who had been watching from the window, went out and told him she had a bite for him in the shed, and he went in with her at once and drank coffee and ate the bread she buttered. He didn't, so he told her, want to touch things any more. So she broke the bread and he carried the pieces to his mouth with an air of hating them and fearing. When he went over to his house, Raven went with him, and, finding Jerry had milked and driven the cows to pasture, they stood outside, miserably loitering, because Tenney had evidently made that resolve not to go in.

"I suppose," said Raven, after a little, to recall him, "the milk is in there."

"Yes," said Tenney. "I s'pose 'tis."

"It isn't strained, you know. What do you mean to do about it?"

"Do?" said Tenney. "Let it set."

Again they loitered, back and forth, sometimes on one side of the woodpile, sometimes the other, each with a pretense of finding the woodpile itself a point of interest. Suddenly Tenney ceased his foolish walk up and down.

"Look here," said he, "should you jest as lieves go in?"

"Yes," said Raven. "Only you'd better come with me. Get it over. You've got to go into your own house."

"What I want," said Tenney, "is a blue apron, blue with white specks. I don't believe it's there, but if 'tis I want it."

To Raven, this was not strange. It was Tira's apron he wanted, something that belonged to her, to touch, perhaps to carry about with him as a reminder of the warmth and kindliness that lay in everything she owned. Blue!

that was her Madonna color. No wonder Tenney remembered it, if it was blue.

"It ain't hangin' up," said Tenney, with a particularity that seemed to cause him an intense pain of concentration. "She never'd hang it up with t'others. It's folded. Mebbe in her work-basket, mebbe—my God in heaven! she wouldn't ha' kep' it. She's burnt it up. You take off the cover o' the kitchen stove. You look there an' see if you can't find the leastest scrid. Blue, you remember, all folded up."

Raven went into the kitchen where the pails of milk were on the table, waiting. He took off the stove cover and looked in, still an idle compliance, to quiet the man's mind. It was like an outcome to a dream. For there it was, a soft disorder easily indicating burned cloth, and one shred of blue, a piece perhaps an inch and a half square, hemmed on three sides: the end of an apron string. He took this carefully out, and stood there looking at it a tense moment, as if it could summon Tira back to tell him what it meant; took out his pocketbook, laid it in, and put the pocketbook away. Then he went back to Tenney.

"You were right," he said. "She burned it up."

Tenney stared at him for what seemed a long time.

"Oh," he said, as if it had been Raven who suggested it, "so she burnt it up. Wa'n't there any left—not a scrid?"

"Yes," said Raven, "there was. What do you want of it?"

"Nothin'," said Tenney. "No, I don't want it. If 'twas the whole on't I shouldn't want it, come to think. A man couldn't hang himself by an apron. Even that one you couldn't. I guess"—he turned upon Raven so sick a gaze that Raven advanced to him and put a hand on his

arm—"I guess," said Tenney, "I'm done. I've got to git some sleep. Should you jest as soon I'd go up to that shack o' yourn an' lay down a spell?"

Again they went up to the hut, and Tenney, throwing himself on the couch, was at once asleep. All that day Raven watched by him, and that night also they were there together: a strange day and night, Raven remembered afterward, with Charlotte coming and Nan and finally Dick, all with food or wistful companionship, and Nan's assuring him, in her way of finding nothing out of the common, that everything had been done for Tira, and she would go over to the service. Charlotte would go with her. It would be better—her eyes questioned him, and he nodded, not answering. It would be better he should not go. On the third day she appeared again, in the middle of the afternoon, and said she had just come from Mountain Brook and everything was—— That she did not finish, Tenney's somber eyes waited upon her with such a dumb expectancy. What was going to be done, she wondered. Tenney couldn't stay in the hut, keeping Raven there with him, as Billy Jones had kept Old Crow. Yet she wasn't sure Raven wouldn't stay. But while she thought it, Tenney was answering her, though he didn't seem to be speaking to either of them. He might have been appealing to something invisible in the room.

"I'll shave me," he said, "an' then I'll see." Something passed over him like a great moving wind. "Why, God A'mighty!" he cried. "I can't stop to shave me. It's now or never, don't you know 'tis?"

He snatched his hat from the chair where he had thrown it, and went out of the hut, limping down the hill. And Raven was with him. He was with him as he hurried along the road so fast that it seemed as if the next step meant breaking into a run. He was with him when, halfway to

the street, Eugene Martin passed them, in his buggy, stopped further on and called to them: "Ride?" He was not laughing now, he was not jibing. He seemed to be constrained to ask them to ride, they were hurrying so. Raven threw a curse at him, but Tenney broke into a limping run and jumped into the tail of the wagon and sat there, his legs dangling. And he called so piercingly to Martin to drive along, to "Hurry, for God's sake, hurry!" that Martin did whip up, and the wagon whirled away, and Raven hurried on alone.

That night, at eight o'clock, Nan went over to ask if Raven had come home, and finding he had not, loitered back to her own gate and waited. She could not go in. If she kept her mind on him, he might come. And presently he came. She walked to meet him and put her hand through his arm. He was walking firmly, but he looked "all in."

"Come," she said. "Supper's waiting."

"No," said Raven, "not yet. I got a fellow to bring me back from the street. Dick said you'd been over."

"Yes," said Nan. "I was horribly worried. Where's Tenney?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"To jail. He had Martin take him to a man he knew about at the street. Sworn in special constable in the War. Had him telephone the sheriff. Then I got there. Had to inquire round, to find out where he'd gone. When I went in, Tenney was sitting there telling the sheriff he'd killed his child. Sheriff asked what for. Said he had to do it. Then I came in and he began to ask me questions about the Lord Jesus Christ."

"But, Rookie," said Nan, "he didn't. He couldn't. Tira told me she——"

"Yes," said Raven heavily. "You may be called to testify."

"But when he asked that," said Nan, "about——" she hesitated.

"About the Lord Jesus Christ? It was whether his sins were whiter than snow."

"What did you tell him?"

"Oh," said Raven, "I told him yes. If he was sorry, they were. Of course I told him yes. What could I tell him? But I don't believe I'd have told Martin yes, if he'd asked me about his sins. He's scared blue. He was there at the gate when I went in. Shook like a palsy, kept saying he didn't know—didn't think—nobody need ask him——"

"What did you say, Rookie?"

"Nothing. I went in to Tenney. Now I'll go back."

"You won't come in and have a bite? Nice supper, Rookie. Saved for you."

"No. Not to-night." He turned away from her as if she were as actually the outside shell of herself as he was of himself. They were mechanical agents in a too terrible world. But he called back to her: "Nan, I've told her."

She was at his side, hoping for more, perhaps a touch of his hand.

"Anne. I got word to her somehow. She understood."

"Was she——" Nan paused.

"Yes," said Raven. "But it's over—done."

He turned away from her and went fast along the road home. He had, she saw, escaped Aunt Anne. He had got himself back. Did his quick steps along the road say he meant to escape her, too? That was easy. Darling Rookie! he should if he wanted to.

XLVI

The story ends, as it began, with a letter. It was written by Raven, in Boston, to Dick, in France, about a year after Tenney gave himself up. The first half of it had to do with accounts, money paid over by Raven to Dick, requisitions sent in by Dick to Raven, concise statements of what Raven judged it best to do in certain contingencies Dick had asked instructions upon. Then it continued on a new page, an intimate letter from Raven to the nephew who was administering the Anne Hamilton Fund. The previous pages would be submitted to the two Frenchmen, who, with Dick, formed the acting board. These last pages were for Dick alone.

"No, Tenney wasn't even indicted. There was the whirlwind of talk you can imagine. Reminiscent, too! 'Don't you remember?' from house to house, and whenever two men met in the road or hung over the fence to spit and yarn. It was amazing, the number of folks who had set him down as 'queer,' 'odd,' all the country verdicts on the chap that's got to be accounted for. Even his religion was brought up against him. The chief argument there was that he always behaved as if the things he believed were actually so. He believed in hell and told you you were bound for it. But I can't go into that. They couldn't, the ones that tried to. They got all balled up, just as their intellectual betters do when they tackle theology. All this, of course, began before you went away, and it continued in mounting volume. If you want New

England psychology, you have it there, to the last word. That curious mixture of condemnation and acceptance! They believed him capable of doing things unspeakable, and yet there wasn't a public voice to demand an inquiry as to whether he really had done them. They cheerfully accepted the worst and believed the best. And it's true he had behaved more or less queer for a long time, wouldn't speak to people when he met them, didn't seem to know them, and then suddenly breaking out, in the blacksmith's shop or buying his grain at the store, and asking if they were saved. The women were the queerest. They said he set his life by the child. Why, he couldn't even bear to go to the funeral of his wife or the child either, and hadn't they seen him and Tira drivin' by, time and again, the baby in Tira's lap, in his little white coat and hood? I don't know how many times I heard the evidence of that little white hood. Even Charlotte caught it and plumped it at me.

"You remember yourself how disgusted the authorities were when he trotted about like a homeless dog and insisted on being arrested for a crime they knew he didn't commit. Poor old Tenney! they said, any man might be crazed, losing his wife and child in one week. They were very gentle with him. They told him if he hung round talking much longer he'd be late for his planting. Of course the doctor did set the pace. He'd told, everywhere he went, how Tira had sent for him at once, and how she had said she had, in that hideous country phrase, 'overlaid' the child. One interesting psychological part of it has persisted to this day: the effect Tira had on the doctor, his entire belief in her simple statement which she was never asked to swear to. (You remember there was no inquest.) He never, he said, was so sorry for a woman in his life. He seems to have been so determined to prove

her a tragic figure that he wouldn't for a moment have the disaster lightened by denying her that last misfortune of having done it herself. Lots of these things I haven't told you, they're so grim and, to me now, so wearing. They've got on all our nerves like the devil, and I fancy even the Wake Hill natives are pretty well fed up with 'em. At first they couldn't get enough. When Tenney couldn't get the law to believe in him so far as to indict him, the embattled farmers took it on themselves to cross-examine him, not because they thought for a minute he was guilty, but because they itched to hear him say so: drama, don't you see? And he never wavered in asserting he did it: only when they asked him how, he just stared, and once told a particularly smart Alec, he guessed it was a man's own business how he killed his own child. And he stayed up in the hut, just as he was doing when you went away, and night after night I had to stay with him. Stuck to me like a burr and wore me threadbare asking if he was forgiven, and if that didn't mean he was whiter than snow. I tell you, Dick, it was all so involved that I believe, although he used the set phrases about the Lord Jesus Christ, he really believed it was I that had forgiven him. He used to ask me to tell God to do it for my sake; and I remembered Old Crow and how he played up to Billy Jones, and, if you'll believe it, I *did* ask God (though not for my sake!), and horrible as it is, grotesque as it is (no, by George, it isn't grotesque to speak to a man in the only language he can understand! he wanted God and he couldn't any more reach Him! he had to climb up on another man's shoulders), well, I told him it was all right. He was forgiven. Then he scared me blue by saying he was going round preaching the gospel—his farm is sold, you know, stock gone, everything wiped out—and I told him he'd proved too dangerous to be let loose on the world again. But he had me there. He asked if he was

forgiven, why wasn't he whiter than snow? And he hung to me like my shadow, and asked if he couldn't keep on living in the hut, till he felt strong enough to preach. I told him he could, and blest if I didn't see him and me there together, world without end, like Old Crow and Billy Jones, for nothing was ever going to persuade him to let go of me again. You'd better laugh, Dick. Nan and I had to. We almost cried. It is funny. I bet Old Crow laughed. But Tenney saved me. He took it into his own hands. And what do you think did it? We went down to the house one morning for breakfast, and Charlotte came out to meet us, tying on a clean apron. It was blue with white spots (I forgot you don't see any significance in that, but Tenney did) and he stopped short and said: 'God A'mighty! I was in hopes I never should set eyes on a woman's apron again.'

"I went up to have a bath (my staying at the hut was a kind of emergency business, you see) and he disappeared, and Charlotte and Jerry didn't get on to it that he was really gone, and later on he was seen wading into the water over at Mountain Brook, there by the stepping stones. The Donnyhills saw him, and at first they thought he knew what he was about, but kept on watching him. He stooped and dipped himself, and they had an idea it was some kind of a self-conducted baptism. I believe it was. Nan often has to remind me that 'he's a very religious man.' But they watched, and presently he went under, and they knew then he was making way with himself, and the Donnyhill boy, that calm young giant, fished him out, Tenney fighting him furiously. And it began to look to me as if he ought to be under a mild supervision (it wasn't for nothing you and your mother let fly at me with your psychiatry! I escaped myself, but I learned the formula). And now Tenney, agreeing to it like a lamb, is at that little sanitarium Miss Anne Hamilton started

'up state,' and very well contented. Nan goes to see him, and so do I. He is as mild—you can't think! Reads his Bible every minute of the day when he isn't doing the work they give him or converting the staff.

"You'll say he's insane. I don't know whether he is or not. I don't know whether they'll say so, the psychopathic experts they've let loose on him. I simply think he found the difficulties of his way too much for him and he revolted. He tried to right the balance of some of the most mysteriously devilish inequalities a poorly equipped chap ever found himself up against (strange forces that struck at him in the dark) and being ignorant and at the same time moved by more volts of energy than even the experts will be able to compute, he took the only path he saw, slam-bang into the thick of the fight. As to his spouting his Bible like a geyser—well, if he believes in it as the actual word of God, a word addressed to him, why shouldn't he spout it? And if it tells him that, after certain formulæ of repentance, his sins shall be whiter than snow, why shouldn't he believe that and say so with the simplicity he does? All the same, I don't think he's exactly the person to wander at large, and I've no idea what will happen when his good conduct and general mildness come it over the psychiatrists. I grin over it sometimes, all by myself, for I remember Old Crow and Billy Jones and I wonder if the logic of inherited events is going to herd Tenney and me together into the hut to live out our destiny together. But I don't think so, chiefly because I want to keep my finger in this pie of the French Fund and because it would distress Nan. Distress you, too, I guess! And me!

"Now, as to Nan. You gave it to me straight from the shoulder, and I've got to give you one back. I agree with

you. There's no hope for you. She's enormously fond of you, but it's not *that kind.* And Nan's old-fashioned enough to insist on that or nothing. I was so meddlesome as to bring it up with her before you went away. She put me in my place, told me practically it was nobody's business but hers—and yours—and that she'd already talked it out with you and that you're a 'dear' and you 'saw.' So, old man, as you say, that's that. *Finis.* But when, after I've butted in, you butt in and accuse me of not 'seeing,' so far as I myself am concerned, of holding her off, of being unfair to her, all the rest of it (very intemperate letter, you must own) I've got to give you your quietus as Nan gave me mine. First place, you say, with a cheek that makes my backbone crawl, that Nan 'loves' me. (Do you really want to be as Victorian as that, you slang-slinging young modern? But I know! You think I mightn't catch on to your shibboleths and you borrow what you judge to be mine, give me the choice of weapons, as it were.) And you're a trump, Dick! Don't think I don't know that, and if I poke fun at you it's to keep from slopping all over you with the Victorian lavishness you'd expect. What did we ever fight for about your youth and my age? Or wasn't it about that, after all? Was it really about—Nan?

"Well, when it comes to 'love, I do love Nan. There you have it, good old-fashioned direct address. She is as immediate to me as my own skin and veins. She always has been. She began to grow into me when she was little, and she kept on growing. There are fibers and rootlets of Nan all through me, and the funny part of it is I love to feel them there. I can't remember being dominated by anybody without resenting it, wanting to get away—escape! escape!—but I never for an instant have felt that

about Nan. She's the better part of me. Good Lord! she's the only part of me I take any particular pleasure in or that I can conceive of as existing after I join Old Crow. (Not that I'm allowed to take much pleasure in her now. She sees me when I call, answers when I consult her about the Fund—and she's been tremendously sympathetic and valuable there—but she seems to feel and, I've no doubt, for very good reasons, that we're better apart. She has, I believe, a theory about it; but we needn't go into that. And I don't quarrel with it.)

"The queer part of it is that I feel Nan herself couldn't break the bond between us, couldn't if she tried. It's as deep as nature, as actual as Old Crow. I can give you a curious proof of it. I might be almost swamped by somebody—yes, I mean Tira. I might as well say so as hear you saying it over this letter—somebody that is beauty and mystery and a thousand potencies that take hold on nature itself. But that doesn't push Nan away by an inch. If I'm swamped, Nan's swamped with me. If I mourn the beauty and the piteousness withdrawn, Nan mourns, too. It's Nan and I against the world. But it isn't Nan and I with the world. The world is against us. Do you see? For I'm a year older than when I saw you last. And though many of the things you felt about the years weren't true, a lot of 'em were, and they're a little truer now. And one of them is that I've got to give Nan a fighting chance to mate with youth and—oh, exactly what you've got. I wish you had her—no, I'm damned if I do. I may not be young enough for jealousy, but I am unregenerate enough. I probably mean I wish I wished it. For in spite of my revolt against the earth, I'd like to give Nan the cup, not of earth sorceries but earth loveliness, and let her swig it to the bottom. And then, if Old Crow's right and this is only a symbol and

we've got to live by symbols till we get the real thing, why, then I'm sentimental enough—Victorian! yes, say it, and be hanged!—to want to believe Nan and I shall some time—some time—— Anyhow, I'm not going to ask her to spend her middle years—just think! 'figure to yourself!'—when Nan's forty, what will your revered uncle be?

"Now I've told you. This is the whole story, the outline of it. And why do I tell you instead of merely inviting you to shut up as Nan did me? Because if you retain in your dear meddlesome head any idea that Nan, as you say, 'loves' me, you're to remember also that Nan is not in any sense an Ariadne on a French clock, her arm over her head, deserted and forlorn. You are to remember I adore her and, if I thought we could both in a dozen years or so perish by shipwreck or Tenney's axe (poor Tenney!) I should get down on my knees to her and beg her (can't you hear our Nan laugh?) to let me marry her. (Probably she wouldn't, old man—marry me, I mean. We're seldom as clever as we think, even you. So there's that.) But, in spite of my erratic leanings toward Old Crow-ism and sundry alarming dissatisfactions with the universe, I still retain the common sense to see Nan, at forty, worrying over my advancing arteriosclerosis and the general damned breaking up of my corporeal frame. Not on your life. Now—shut up!

"Yes, your mother continues to be dissatisfied over your being there. She thinks it's all too desultory, but is consoled at your being mentioned in the same breath with 'two such distinguished Frenchmen.' I tell her you can't stop for a degree, and maybe if you follow out your destiny you'll get one anyway, and that, if you still want to write books, this will give you something to write about. But she doesn't mind so much since she's gone into politics, hammer and tongs."

Now this letter reached Richard Powell in the dingy office in Paris, where he happened to be in consultation with his two advisers who were, with an untiring genius of patience and foresight, interpreting to him daily the soul of France. He went over the first part of the letter with them, article by article, point by point, very proud, under his composure, of their uniform agreement with the admirable Monsieur Raven. And after their business session was concluded and the two Frenchmen had gone, Dick addressed hmself to the last part of the letter, given in these pages. He bent himself to it with the concentration that turns a young face, even though but for the moment, into a prophetic hint of its far-off middle age. If he had kept enough of his shy self-consciousness to glance at himself in the glass, he would have been able to smile at the old fear of what the years might do to him. No heaviness there, such as he remembered in his father's face: only trouble, pain, and their mysteriously refining tracery. But the heaviness was in his heart. He had to understand the letter absolutely, not only what it said but all it implied. If it actually meant what he believed it to mean at first reading, it drew a heavy line across his own life. Nan had drawn the line before, but this broadened it, reënforced it with a band of black absolutely impossible to cross. And it did mean it, and, having seen that, without a possibility of doubt, he enclosed the letter in an envelope, addressed it to Nan, and leaned back in his chair, never, he believed, to think it over again, never so long as he and Nan lived. There was no residuum of sentiment in his mind as there was in Raven's that, after Nan had finished with this life, according to her own ideas, there might be hope of another Nan bloomed out of this one somewhere else and another Dick, risen out of his ashes, to try his luck again. No, the line across the page

was the line across their lives, and, said Dick: "That's that." But he caught his breath, as he said it, and was glad there was no one by to hear. Anybody who heard would have said it was a sob. He was, he concluded, rather fagged with the day. These confounded Frenchmen, with their wits you couldn't keep up with, they took it out of you.

This was why Raven, in Wake Hill, on the morning the letter came to Nan in Boston, got a telegram from her, saying: "Come back." He had gone there to stay over a night, after a few hours' visit with Tenney, who was eagerly glad to see him, and again begging to be confirmed in his condition of spiritual whiteness. Raven had just got to his house when the message was telephoned up from the station, and its urgency made him horribly anxious. He had been especially aware of Nan all day. Little threads of feeling between them had been thrilling to messages he couldn't quite get, as if they were whispers purposely mysterious, to scare a man. He was on edge with them. They quickened the apprehension the message brought upon him overwhelmingly. She never would have summoned him like that if she hadn't needed him, not a word by telephone, but his actual presence. He had Jerry take him back again to the station, and in the late afternoon he walked in on Nan waiting for him in one of the rooms Anne Hamilton had kept faithful to the traditions of bygone Hamiltons, but that now knew her no more. It was Nan the room knew, Nan in her dull blue dress against the background of pink roses she made for herself and the room, Nan white with the pallor of extreme emotion, bright anxiety in her eyes and a tremor about her mouth. She went to him at once, not as the schoolgirl had run, the last time she offered her child lips to him, but as if the moment were a strange moment, a dazzling peak of a

moment to be approached—how should she know the way to her heart's desire?

"What is it, dear?" asked Raven, not putting her off, as he had the schoolgirl, but only unspeakably thankful for the bare fact of having found her safe. "What's happened?"

"I had to tell you straight off," said Nan, "or I couldn't do it at all. He sent me your letter—Dick. The one about me."

Raven was conscious of thinking clearly of two things at once. He was, in the first place, aware of the live atoms which were the letter, arranging themselves in his mind, telling him what they had told Nan. He was also absently aware that Nan's face was so near his eyes it was nothing but a blur of white, and that when he bent to it, the white ran, in a rush, into a blur of pink.

"So Dick sent it to you," he said. "Well, God bless him for it. Kiss me, my Nan."

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